

THE REALM OF LITERATURE

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LITERATURE

BY
HENRY W. WELLS

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PREFACE

THE literary convention of the Preface has flourished somewhat lavishly in our own times of exaggerated self-consciousness. One often turns with a smile of relief to some medieval book where the title affords the sole introduction, and the whole work is concluded with a conventional suggestion that the reader pray for the author's soul. Still, our modern ways in this matter afford many advantages. For example, I am enabled to state once and for all that the theories and judgments of art offered in my book always appear to me tentative and open to dispute. No two persons writing on such a subject can possibly come to quite the same conclusions. Finality is impossible. Nevertheless, should the reader be confronted at every turn with "possibly" or "perhaps," his patience would be even more sorely tried than by persistent dogmatism. Let this Preface therefore serve to express the actual trepidation with which I have at all times approached a most ambitious theme.

My book is addressed to any person seriously interested in the arts of reading and writing. I have ventured to prefer the conservative attitude which subordinates the author to his work, to the biographical attitude, at present extremely popular, which subordinates the work to its author. My study falls into two parts, the first half dealing with the relation of literature to art in general, and, broadly speaking, with the relation of any book to any reader. The second half deals with special forms and problems of literature, rather than with literature as a whole. Throughout my studies, highly generalized as

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they remain, I have however sought to keep in consciousness that I am writing as a member of a modern community, face to face with its peculiar aesthetic problems. Although sparing in quotation, I have been profuse in allusions to English literature of many historical periods, believing that only by carefully chosen references can general views on this subject be tolerably established.

For the view of Chaucer expressed on page 130, my chief obligation, I am pleased to acknowledge, is to the novelist, poet and scholar, Edna Worthley Underwood. I am also much indebted to Professor William Tenney Brewster, Mr. Henry K. Dick, Dr. Ralph Marcus, Professor Thomas O. Mabbott, Mr. Hugh Gray Lieber, Mr. John Storck, Mr. John Hefter, and Mr. Charles Francis Bopes. A more distant indebtedness, but one which only the deepest gratitude can repay, I acknowledge to Mr. Stark Young.

My own work approaches the problem of literature through that of general aesthetics. Of late two admirable studies of painting, which likewise begin with discussions of general aesthetics, have appeared in this country. I refer to DeWitt H. Parker's, *The Analysis of Art*, and Herbert S. Langfeld's, *The Aesthetic Experience*. My own book was written before I had myself read these works, and indeed bears no close resemblance to them. Nevertheless my reader may be interested to note that I am attempting in the field of the aesthetics of literature something of that which these scholars have accomplished in relation to another art.

HENRY W. WELLS.

April, 1927.

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THE REALM OF LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

THE REALM OF ART

No fruitful conception of any art can be formed unless preceded by a conception of the nature of art itself. Any serious inquiry into literature, for example, presupposes an inquiry into the larger domain of thought of which literature forms a part. I have therefore prefaced my study of literature with an investigation of the general aesthetic problem. To this subject I desire to give a somewhat new, although by no means a radically unprecedented, interpretation.

Modern aesthetics has developed rapidly, chiefly under the impulse of scientific psychology. Science first made itself felt upon aesthetics indirectly. A new philosophical approach to the arts arose. Thinkers discovered that even the most difficult art-works might be considered as products of an imaginative faculty common to all mankind. The study of literature, for instance, became merely a phase of the problem of language. The thought of Croce well exhibits the refreshing tendency to find the springs of art in our general human experience. The entire field of literary criticism discovers itself invigorated under the influence of this spacious doctrine.

Psychology however has cast more than an indirect influence upon our view of art. Emanating from the views of Freud has arisen a school of aesthetic criticism deal-

ing with art in its relation to dreams. Most of the writers indoctrinated with Freud's psychology have, however, aimed rather to show the large share that thinking analogous to that of dreams plays in art, than to study the problem of art as a whole. The tendency of such investigations has been, I think, to cast undue emphasis upon the dream-like quality. Professor F. C. Prescott, for example, in his book, *The Poetic Mind*, concludes that the visionary element in literature constitutes all its life-giving power; rational thinking and technical sagacity are in his view rigorously subordinated. The former values Professor Prescott associates with the creative genius; the latter he somewhat curiously assigns to the repressive influence of society. Thus he writes: "Literature, in other words, is the result of a conflict between the individual impulse, the life giving and progressive principle, on the one hand, and the power of authority, the controlling and conservative principle on the other." He cites at length the English romantic poets of the last century to support his own distinctly romantic view. Thus his index lists seventeen references to Coleridge, one to Chaucer, and none to George Crabbe. He gives, I believe, far too little attention to the actual intellectual attainments of the poets as technicians, and especially to those qualities which they share with the philosophers. Such is the inevitable temptation of a writer who approaches an art with the powerful weapons of distinctly modern psychology at his disposal. The real difficulty consists in striking a nice balance in our estimate of the two factors. A judicious attempt in this regard engages us with a promise of highly fruitful results.

I know of no more sane and illuminating attitude from which to view art than to consider it as one of our three prevailing states of consciousness,—art, dream, and the normal awakened state,—as evolved from both

dreaming and the awakened mind, acquiring certain qualities of its own, and retaining in more or less altered forms qualities from the two realms adjoining it. Other descriptions appear to me less inviting as groundwork for a philosophy of the subject. Scholars have entertained various theories of the origin of art, especially in relation to vitalism and to play; they have defined art as expression, imagination, intuition, "significant form," and even as a phenomenon embracing all our self-sufficing activity. Under these theories art often is seen either dilated so far as to be unrecognizable as the subject commonly supposed to be under discussion, or contracted into a slender, subtle thread of spiritual activity, weaving an elusive path through the mind.

The approach proposed here synthesizes many of the earlier doctrines. It may be regarded as fortunate in that, although it distinctly invites development along technical lines, it by no means depends on such development to be understood. We are led to perceive how naturally man is drawn to art. The position of art seems clearer as we not only compare it with phases of our two other chief forms of consciousness,—dream and our normal waking mind,—but contrast it with these. We are given an admirable starting point from which to describe its elements. Moreover in terms of its nature, so described, we may comment on two chief tendencies which it exhibits, and which continually pull its votaries in one or another of two directions, causing the critical wars that so frequently have torn the aesthetic field. Finally, from this point of vantage we may weigh, in terms of art's nature and of certain forces hostile to it, its chances to evolve into richer forms, and its danger of falling into decay. Art can, I believe, be rightly considered neither a normal phase of our awakened consciousness, as Doctor Johnson conceived it, nor a mere transfigura-

tion of our dream consciousness, as Professor Prescott so largely conceives it. Its essence lies in creating a unique state, with varying degrees of compromise, never leaning too largely in one or the other direction.

The reader will, I trust, in the first place freely grant that distinctions between the states need not be minutely precise to be valid and significant. Since highly curious intermediate stages of drowsiness intervene between sleep and a full waking, we shall also expect gradations between the incipient and full aesthetic consciousness. Such stages, though in themselves perplexing to the student, confirm rather than refute an evolutionary point of view. Moreover as the sleeping and the awakened mind of an individual comprise one personality, the two states having in each individual much in common, so the art sphere in any person will be largely determined by influences from his other states. How we are impelled to the art sphere, and what constitute the chief of its unique characteristics, may now be the subject of our inquiry. I shall reserve a further discussion of the definition for a later part of the present Essay.

Man is drawn to art by his primary impulses, the desire to enjoy happiness and to shun pain. His two more familiar stages of consciousness supply no opportunities analogous to those of art for realizing these ends. Asleep or awake, to be sure, he may enjoy intense happiness, but is ever beset by insecurity. In the given conditions of his life, however, lie hopeful possibilities for experiment. Although his awakened and his dream consciousness are as states to all intents mutually exclusive, these may combine to the formation of an essentially new consciousness. In the resultant realm his glimpses of fleeting beauty and happiness can in a new manner be secured to him. And beauty, taking the sting from the serpent's mouth, may play with pain in a garden wherein

aesthetic emanations of all things become friendly to mankind.

Although art's naive triumph is to give us innocent and simple joy, art should not be confused with sentimental day-dreaming. For its boldest triumph consists in leading captivity captive, in making sorrow smile and the desert bloom. It was to be sure a romantic poet who declared: "Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought." Yet art cannot be said generally to shun images of pain. We read solemn sadness in the eyes of many a classical statue. Tragedy and Comedy are of one birth. Buildings of sombre grandeur are no less delightful than those gay and flamboyant. Music does not dispel sadness but transmutes it into a sad joy. Beauty lays her hand upon us and stills our grief. In her kingdom old sorrows become eternal delight. Such a transfigured world belongs only to art; man asleep or in his normal consciousness knows nothing of it.

While art permits an abandon, its general tendency is towards a heightened but serene mood. Although its passions are intense, they are neutralized by beauty, and so proportioned and disposed as to leave the mind ultimately in repose. Pleasure in art enjoys a unique tone. A haven of unbroken bliss is rarely suggested. Not art but religion establishes the dogma of a promised land. Art freely indulges images and moods drawn from our familiar human experience, and like Moses strikes clear water from the rocks of the wilderness. Neither waking nor asleep does man know in full this joyous serenity, this immunity from the actual fangs of grief.

Art, indeed, may at times be that which we hear it often so carelessly described to be, self-expression. An artist may with full awareness express the very actual joys and sorrows of his own life. Of course man can, strictly speaking, spin from himself only that which he

has taken unto himself. Nevertheless art typically soars free from self-consciousness. The artist in the midst of his sonata, his landscape, his poem, his statue, his dream of a cathedral or his rapt dance, rises above himself into joyous self-forgetfulness. Dreams are remorselessly egotistical. In our common awakened consciousness egoism may cause weariness and pain. We may to be sure take a thousand roads that lead away from the cruder forms of egoism. But whether we create art ourselves or enjoy it passively, we choose a course peculiarly fruitful to purge us of all that contracts us too narrowly within ourselves. The voice of art is the voice of humanity.

It will thus be seen that art at once approximates and departs from that other great dream of man, religion. Religion is dogmatic and ritualistic, art free and untrammelled. Though singular, it is none the less true that religion may be described as finite and art infinite. Religion binds man to the worship of a part of the infinitude of art. The one believes, the other "makes believe." Moreover religion assumes authority in morals, while art, although its forms may incidentally be moral, remains primarily and in its essence unmoral. Religion officially steps out of the framework of its dreams, to guide man's distraught ethical life. Art, too, especially the art of words, frequently expresses man's ethical intelligence; indeed it has proved far more friendly to a rational morality than religion. But the artist acts towards us as God towards Joseph: he instructs us in a dream.

The relation of art to morality, neither incognizant of it nor discovering in moral impulses its sole claim to our attention, leads us to the most important of all the factors that give art its unique position. Art has neither the glaring reality commonly felt to belong to the world as seen under awakened eyes, nor the feeling

of utter unreality commonly ascribed in retrospect to dreams. In other words, it seeks at the same time the illusion of reality and the illusion of unreality, with the result that a third state is evolved. Even the keenest realists do not paint scrupulously from their model. Thus George Crabbe, at the conclusion of what I am inclined to consider his masterpiece, *The Borough*, writes that his figures are all composite creations; he has, in short, fashioned a new world, which instructs us morally in regard to the real world, but is itself avowedly a fable, even as *The Faerie Queene*. On the other hand art also requires something of the belief which we commonly extend to our familiar daily world. Poetry, says Bacon, is "fained history." The artist or reader must at least temporarily believe in the ghosts, elves, fairies and sprites with which he deals. These statements have of course been made in the simplest possible form. Neither the savage nor the philosopher distinguishes so pedantically between the states of dream, art and awakened life as do the philistines of our modern world. The conclusion however holds in substance good: that art must always have something of actuality and something also of a confessedly visionary nature. These conditions the laws of technique no less than the laws of imagination impose. Art can never *be* nature, nor ever be wholly divorced from nature.

Let us now briefly consider wherein art resembles man's primal inheritance of dreams.

To the devoted artist himself, life appears a background setting off art. The average man who enjoys art finds it a bright interval in his more serious adventure of daily living. One honors the flower above the leaf, the other the leaf above the flower. But each senses the distinction between two forms of experience. Even those who care little about the definition of these states,

recognize their existence, and have at some time felt the sharp contrast between them. The aesthetic experience, moreover, must always be confessed the exotic, the magical one. It is the spring that bursts suddenly upon the sleeping earth, the blossom that flowers for a week, or a day only, upon the bough.

Dreams are less lovely than art, but equally contrasted with their background—the unconsciousness of sleep. From the unconscious mind rises the dream, an island in a shoreless sea, and vanishes as mysteriously as it has arisen, the entire phantasm beyond control. Art of course remains to some degree within our control, and in so far as it is controllable resembles other of our awakened mental processes. But more than any other person the artist knows the meaning of inspiration. He only in part controls or seeks to control his art. Visions appear before him not as strictly premeditated or planned, but as a power greater than his own will determines. When this power is present he answers to its call. When it deserts him, if he is wise, he becomes inactive. The performer can, it is true, control his skill more surely than the creative artist. Yet the performer also knows the value of inspiration. Above all, the artist, the performer and the hearer alike distinguish most sharply between the moments of art and non-aesthetic experience. Even when these moments are long premeditated, as that a recital shall begin at eight o'clock and end at ten, the transition between the art and its surrounding element is sharply, even surprisingly, felt. We never wholly outgrow this peculiar sense of shock. It differs widely from the transition experienced at the beginning or end of a game, or of a period of strictly logical or scientific study. Metaphysics describes, but pure art actually introduces us to, a new realm of reality. It discovers to us a new world of emotional experi-

ence, with a tone far unlike that of its enveloping medium. Moreover our sense of the distinction between art and everyday reality increases precisely in accord with the ratio of our enjoyment.

The dance ceases, and we fall back into another self. The curtain is lowered upon an act, even of a so-called realistic drama, and we find ourselves magically transported, not from one room or town to another, but from one to another world. The symphony ceases, and we adjust ourselves to the resumption of our daily life, often with a sense of relief, for exacting art may leave us distinctly fatigued in the pursuit of its intricacies. Art of course produces various degrees of ecstasy and illusion. At the strongest it powerfully negates all but its own being, ruthlessly binding our minds to itself. Most persons have experienced, after moving art, a mental stumbling, until normal balance is recovered. We return to ourselves, disturbed to find the hurtling cabs in the street so oblivious of our feelings. During a performance of an art-work our eye may at first unconsciously fasten upon, say a lamp globe, a chair, or a bit of masonry; but the moment that we become aware of a foreign object, we sense the unfathomable gulf between meaning and non-meaning, between the excitement of the art and the blankness of extraneous things.

As a dream rises from unconsciousness art rises from our normal life; dream and art are equally exotic, and equally startling when brought into sharpened contrasts with their opposites. Surely, this proportion is more than a metaphor. Is it not plausible that man, consciously or subconsciously taking his dreams as analogy, creates art, in the will to dream awake?

An analysis of the dream-like qualities of art abundantly confirms such a supposition. In art as in dreams we find a strong flow of intuition. Sensations become

more than normally powerful; the emotional tone is heightened; and from dreams art may even be held to have developed another of its predominant qualities, a sentimental form of repose. We note further that in both art and dreams, with the general heightening of sensations appear an extraordinary rapidity and abruptness of thought, grotesque and implausible forms, highly symbolical imagery, and a marked relaxation from moral responsibility. In art as in dreams thought not only seems but is in truth preternaturally swift, dream crowding a year into a minute, as art may crowd an aeon into an hour.

Certain of the dream-like qualities enumerated in the preceding paragraph belong to all art, and others to certain types of art only. Thus all experience that in any way deserves the name of art arouses abnormal sensitivity. If its power fails to amaze us, as in *Macbeth*, its delicacy astonishes us, as in *The Rape of the Lock*. The heightening of the emotional tone by no means implies perfervid sentiment. All art is of course of a highly intuitive character. Again, even the most startling imagery must fail as art if it has not something of the serenity of romancing, of the quieter phase of dreams. Dreams to be sure have actually been thought of vast moment; the ancients declaring them revelations from the gods, and the modern priesthood of Psyche, revelations from nature. But in retrospect we of to-day often smile at dreams, taking them lightly. And if dreams occasionally startle, they at times move far more smoothly than most of life. Although we may laugh in sleep, the dream is intrinsically not so witty as the awakened consciousness. Nevertheless the dream world knows moments of happy irresponsibility. We find life on the whole less serious when dreaming than when awake. We smile less in sleep and are more subject to terror, it is

true. But asleep we resemble the savage children of the forest; we have fewer cares than when awake. And this peculiarly convincing serenity is always to be experienced in satisfying art.

Even in the most sober art, thought, as in dreams, must move with an unusual rapidity, suggestion playing a quick game. The most explicit and realistic of the poets, and the most chastened and severe of painters and musicians, still invite us to entertain far more than meets the uninitiated eye and ear.

Finally, the aesthetic experience itself is in a very real sense divorced from the moral impulse. At risk of possible redundancy I shall illustrate this principle. Let us take as an instance of art the oration of Cicero against Catiline. The artist, to be sure, spoke with a utilitarian purpose. His immediate aim was to induce Catiline to leave the Senate Chamber and Rome. The student of aesthetics observes, however, that his speech was so planned that even Catiline should derive the full benefit of its rhetoric. The conspirator heard the oration till the end, before rising from his seat. The Senate was invited to enjoy to the full a formal and artistic work. From a political point of view it was of the utmost importance that action should follow words. Yet the speech, when viewed as art only, was complete within itself. Even the most utilitarian of the great works of art has, then, in its essentially aesthetic nature no moral value. Of the general place of the critical or commentating faculty in art I shall have more to say later, when the relation of art to our waking consciousness is discussed. One more highly familiar illustration may however be given. Legend recalls that the herald of William the Conqueror led his troops to the battle of Hastings chanting the Song of Roland. A better battle hymn could not have been found. Subsequently however the

poem has delighted readers by no means on the edge of battle. Its more ideal beauty rises over all that is immediate and confining. To conclude, the aesthetic experience is to an important degree non-moral, while art successfully generalizes its moral implications so that it may not justly be called in a narrow sense utilitarian.

Thus far all art resembles dream. It must show a strong flow of intuition, great vividness, sensibility and rapidity, an inherent quality of repose, a slackening of moral responsibility, and a superficial but highly striking detachment from its background of experience. We may recall, however, those notable qualities in dreams which belong to some but not to all art. Implausible, abrupt and grotesque, only romantic art can properly be called. Symbolism in art only at times steps to the fore. Thus some art in many phases comes vastly closer to the dream state than other art, for some works neighbor the dreaming, and others, the fully awakened, consciousness.

Art as a whole partakes no less strongly of the awakened than of the dream-rapt mind. Certain of the resemblances are of course of the most obvious character. While many of the most elaborate of the patterns of our wakened consciousness may at will be repeated virtually unchanged, we observe that dreams are largely beyond our control and are rarely repeated without important variations. We have as a rule much clearer recollection of the events of our wakened life than of our dreams. Artists may here be seen in agreement with the normal awakened consciousness, since they think in terms at least to a very remarkable degree communicable through the medium of the art which they select, and create works to which we may again and again return. These considerations appear however of a comparatively superficial nature, when contrasted with other similarities between art and fully awakened consciousness.

All our arts depend to a most important degree upon the development of a technique. Whereas in dream, technique is rudimentary, the labor of our awakened life consists largely in technical disciplines. Dreams might be likened to art without a specially developed medium. The medium of literature is, of course, words; that of music, sound; of painting and the plastic arts, color and form in various degrees. Dreams apparently represent a survival of an earlier consciousness of the race, before language, painting, music or any other of the technical arts had emerged to commanding importance. Of course it remains true that poets have claimed to compose poems in dream, and musicians, music. Most persons have no doubt composed some fragments of these arts in sleep. But we may fear that poems which are literally dreams, as *Kubla Khan* may possibly have been, possess as a rule much less merit than that celebrated composition.

Although art is essentially inspirational and intuitive, it is also technical and planned, and to some extent at least a structure of rational thinking. Moreover we enjoy art analytically as well as synthetically. We enjoy dissecting it only less than experiencing it aesthetically. Indeed only pedantry will rigidly rule out the critical and commentating faculty from the spontaneous enjoyment of an art-work. Especially in the case of such an art as painting, which lies fully open for almost instantaneous inspection, we find ourselves continually shifting emphasis from criticism to enjoyment, never wholly the critic, never wholly the enjoyer. In short, our critical faculty, which belongs essentially to our normal and awakened consciousness, rather than to art, is in every way of the utmost value to art as we know it. Without intelligent criticism in the large sense of the word our art would, indeed, be literally the primal anarchy of night and dream. Criticism teaches the artist his technique,

and prepares his ideas. Conversely, great art always deserves study, informative and critical. Not only is our pleasure enhanced by the critical discipline. This discipline may legitimately play a secondary but still a notable role in the periods of our greatest enjoyment. A faculty altogether too conscious to find a place in dreams has then its function in the life of art. We are forced to conclude rational thinking no enemy to art, provided that in that sphere it observe an appropriately subordinate position. Art is like the kiss. We wish it to be neither a thoroughly naive nor a thoroughly rationalistic experience.

No wise men have as yet altogether taken from dreams their riddling quality. What dreams mean, certainly appears a darker problem than what art means, for most dreams seem to a large extent chaotic. Although possessing a poignant intensity similar to that of art, their larger forms generally lack apparent significance. To the institutions of the awakened life we have at least struggled to give an element of coherence. Art is not of course coherent in the sense that the thought of Newton, or that of Hegel, is coherent. Nevertheless unmistakable order lies in any successful work of art. We sense a unity of subject, tone, purpose and design. Indeed art's logic seems equal in rigidity to that of mathematics. Since each art-work has apparently its own logic, few satisfactory rules for art-workmanship however have been educed. Thus it will be seen that in its organizing factors art differs both from dreaming and from the more advanced forms of rational thinking. When compared with mathematics, its logic however powerful may be said to be obscure. When compared with dream its coherence appears as one of its most distinguishing characteristics. In the relatively overt quality of its coherence art may therefore be said to resemble familiar pat-

terns of the fully awakened mind. Indeed so remarkable is the logic of much art, that one is tempted at times to cry that art wakes and philosophy dreams.

Lastly in considering the relation of art to our wakened consciousness, we observe that with much greater frequency and effectiveness than dream it takes rational thinking for its subject matter. Truth as conceived by philosophy, by science, by history and by ethics has profoundly influenced art in its most notable forms. Architecture, painting and sculpture, and above all literature, have expressed in their own manner and material the most powerful elements in ideas elsewhere grounded upon technical considerations. The type of coherence found in art makes such expression possible, while in dreams little of the sort exists. Thus art shows once more its contact with our normal waking consciousness.

That art as we to-day know it springs from the marriage of the waking and the dreaming mind, supplies us with an ideal ground from which to analyze its apparently contradictory tendencies. As child of the awakened and the dreaming consciousness, of day and of night, it partakes of the nature of each, and, like a twilight sky, often becomes more beautiful than that which goes either before or after. The great schools of art in both East and West may be interpreted on the basis of this distinction. So Romantic and Taoistic art may be described as evening becoming night, and Classical and Confucian art, as dawn becoming day.

Let us, for example, apply this outlook to our own literature. As a point of view it supplies, I believe, grounds for most revealing distinctions, whether we consider works in their larger aspects, or in matters of detail. We may begin at the beginning. *The Dream of the Rood*, the fantastic Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives, and the great *Crist*—how clearly are these saturated in the

spirit of dreams! The first frankly employs a dream imagery. The last is even more profoundly visionary, so that England becomes the Patmos and its author the Saint John of the North. How devotedly, on the other hand, Alfred clings to his English earth, always giving, even to translation, the imprint of his own heart, which thirsted for actuality, sobriety, knowledge and law. The chief English poets of the fourteenth century are, of course, Chaucer and William Langland. In the tales of the Canterbury pilgrims, we perceive a calm light of dawn falling upon the faces of men and women just emerging from the visionary night of the Middle Ages. The artist encourages the critical, conscious, rationalistic and familiar mood. Langland on the other hand sees the same world plunged in dream. His wild and fantastic images chase one another as clouds across the face of an autumn moon.

Let us again move onwards. George Chapman, that arch-Elizabethan, composed these lines:

No pen can anything immortal write
That is not steeped in humour of the Night.

Endowed with immense powers of inwardness and subjectivity, he chose the stars as his torches to light the darkness of his dreams. His friend Ben Jonson, on the contrary, in *Bartholomew Fair*, rudely turns upon art the glaring light of too keenly awakened consciousness.

We should of course expect the greatest artists to share equally in the two qualities. As a synthetic poet Shakespere rises supreme. Affording us images of life and death so keen that the illusion of reality becomes all but complete, his poetic instinct infallibly teaches him to soften his lines and colors, if not to plunge them into night, and to retain the illusion also of art. From time to time he pauses and whispers secret things:

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

No artist has more nobly reconciled the reality and the mystery, the seriousness and the playfulness of life and art. He best of all men sensed art's true nature: that it is at one and the same time reality and dream. Whatever truth may lie in my conception of art may be studied to the best advantage in the case of Shakespeare, who turned neither to the right nor to the left, neither to a coldly literal classicism, nor to thoroughly moon-struck romanticism, but placed equal value upon truth and illusion. He is *par excellence* the synthetic poet, in whom the deepest wisdom of art lies treasured, far beyond the full realization of the intrusive critic. No poet has known the secret of his guild better, or buried it more effectually. Unriddle his plays, and you will have unriddled art itself

To an imagery frequently derived from erotic dreams, Spenser brings a superb scholarly intelligence, as student of both philosophy and poetic technique. With a similar impartiality, Milton combines the rational and the visionary elements of art. Bunyan's masterpiece supplies a fine example in still another field.

In Augustan classicism of the age of Pope, we at once perceive the light of day not only shadowless, but refined. Pope was of course too genuine an artist to work by mechanical rule. Like a romantic Elizabethan, he wrote as the spirit moved him, rising to his desk at any unforeseen moment of the day or night to put down a couplet. His style becomes abnormally sensitive, marvelously pregnant, and as purely aesthetic as any in our literature. Art afforded him as true a haven as it was later to afford the romanticists. Form, always at its highest intuitive, more attracted him than mere excitement. Indeed Pope

best represents the effort to render the entire social life of an aristocrat artistic, to reduce manners and even philosophy itself to aesthetic decorum. In the name of art he invaded provinces of our fully awakened consciousness often supposed hostile to art. For poetry, we are told, was Pope's ruling passion. In this supreme master the essentials that poetry borrows from dreams are still present, although the accidents, such as abrupt, implausible action and far-reaching moral irresponsibility, grotesque imagery and a pervasive symbolism, extravagant passion and violent surprise, are unequivocally banished from his serene domain.

With Pope as typical of the greatest extreme to which an artistic genius can go in appropriating to art the qualities of our fully awakened consciousness and denying art many of the qualities of dream, I select for purposes of contrast, Coleridge. In *Kubla Khan*, in *Christabel* and in *The Ancient Mariner*, we have the type of the greatest extreme to which poetic genius can go in appropriating the qualities of dream, and denying all the qualities of waking consciousness save those absolutely necessary to render art triumphant. Had the masterpieces of Coleridge been even more typical of dreams than they are, they would probably have failed to interest our aesthetic consciousness. But with all the magic, vividness, excitement, abruptness, implausibility and darkened, grotesque and symbolical imagery that our aesthetic sense is capable of enjoying, the poet observes just enough clarity in composition, conscious restraint in execution, and faithfulness to our common conceptions of life, to preserve the poems as genuine art-works. They are not merely self-expression, or in other words, Coleridge's dreams. They are true works of art, and rest therefore among the most valued treasures of our race.

It would be fruitless to contrast at length, in painting,

music and the other media of art, works that place us in close accord with the objective world, with others that open boldly upon the world of dreams. A few additional comments must suffice. Romantic music culminates in Wagner, whose art reaches its apogee in *Tristan und Isolde*, a music drama that in all its imagery aspires to the praise of dreams and of the night. In a famous passage of *Die Meistersinger*, Hans Sachs advises the young artist to mind well his dreams. Life itself and all its commotions seem illusory.

Ein Kobold war es
Wahn! Wahn!

In the music of Händel we at once sense an equally powerful and antithetical philosophy.

To illustrate the distinction in the field of painting we may best turn our eyes to the East. There a profound art of portrait painting flourished under the Confucian philosophy, and under Taoistic doctrines perhaps the subtlest, most visionary art that the world has ever known, the impressionistic Oriental landscape painting.

But the world, it may be said, has always known well enough the force of this historical and philosophical distinction, and known also its expression in art. To this comment I reply that I have enlarged upon the field of historical criticism merely in the hope of casting further light upon aesthetic theory. My primary aim is not to interpret art historically, but to indicate, as I trust to have done in the cases of Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, Bunyan, Pope and Coleridge, that successful art has actually demanded the presence of qualities from both the spheres of dream and of fully awakened consciousness. The poetry of Coleridge is not altogether without the psychology of the real world, nor that of Pope without vestiges of dreams; while in the works of Shakespeare,

Spenser and Milton the two elements are balanced impartially. Reflection will I believe betray the fact that every artist, however much he may incline towards one or the other realm, actually reconciles in art important phases of both. The product and the process are witnesses to the same law.

This theory of art bears not only upon art's varied schools, but upon its destiny. The vital qualities of art as we know it in the present cannot have existed in the earliest stages of our race. Nor have authors, I think, seriously enough considered that art as we should define it to-day need by no means endure to the end of the human story. Taking the description of art as given here, for example, we at once perceive grounds to apprehend its decay and even dissolution. Should the world relax further into some mystical profound such as the dreams of advanced Buddhism, art would in our sense of the word cease. Again, should wide-awake America (for so at least she is described to us) contrive to awake still further, and to awake the world with her, art in our sense of the word would come to an end. For art is compounded of two elements. Without both it ceases to be. It has no other choice. Countless persons to-day in our industrial world have lost their sense for art no less than their sense for religion. Art, the Buddhists tell us rightly, is an illusion; and the modern public is disinclined to whatever it suspects to be illusion. Extreme mysticism and materialism have proved equally hostile to art, since they destroy the balance upon which art rests. Again, to mention a more remote possibility, some critics have suggested that the rationalistic element in experimental science may with a resistless power capture the soul of man. The world might then appear under much the aspect of a game of chess. What we now consider the essence of art would disappear; for art

as we understand it would cease to exist in a primarily rationalistic world.

On the other hand there is much to persuade us that art has only begun its career, and that mankind, accepting art as we now conceive it essentially to be, will bring it to undreamed of importance and perfection. No one can of course prophesy safely. I for my own part choose to think art fundamentally secure, and possessed of infinite promise. I am unable to conceive any reformation of its simplest elements as here described. Its triumphs will, it seems, in the future, as in the past, be attained by minds profoundly gifted in both its constituent phases. Artists must be those who bring the joyous liberty of dreams to a compromise with disciplines of awakened consciousness and understanding. Those who are destined to appreciate art are simply those capable of following in a subordinate position the essential activities of the creative artist. Art's security, in short, rests at the heart of life itself. Within us are two contrasted natures. Life offers so many incentives to bring them together, that no foreseen power can, I believe, keep them apart. And on meeting they must of necessity produce a third nature, which is art. We may, it is true, perforce deny art. But to do so proves a denial of the laws of our present life. To accept art is to accept ourselves. Although art alone cannot suffice to give man happiness, when deprived of it he becomes painfully distorted, and when endowed with it, blessed with the fruition of much of his deepest happiness.

CHAPTER II

THE SPRINGS OF ART

FROM the foregoing chapter the reader will at once perceive that art, in the judgment of the present writer, is neither an esoteric secret nor so far confused with non-aesthetic experience as to be totally undefinable. It is well known that some persons would have us imagine art as an occult deity, enthroned amidst the fumes of a temple, and worshipped only by a chosen few. Assiduously these priests of the shrine warn off the supposedly profane intruder. On the other hand incorrigible democrats and moralists picture art as the meek handmaiden of life, or even as life itself. They will have nothing of Mary in the Temple. For them the ideal of art lies instead in the ministrations of Martha. To one sect art seems altogether a dream, to the other, altogether a reality. If our interpretation in the previous chapter be correct, both of these opinions must, however, be erroneous. One can scarcely determine which constitutes the greater offense: ceremoniously to beat the earth before art's feet, or rudely to silence her and turn her out to service. There are really no just grounds for the aesthetes to imprison her in an ivory tower, or for the moralists to deny her a comely and decent reverence.

We have examined art's peculiar place in the human consciousness. Let us now shift to the complementary point of view, and having, so far as seemed feasible, defined art, consider its articulation with our larger realm

of experience. Enough has perhaps already been said as regards the dream world. We may therefore sketch the evolution of the art-consciousness as enacted before our eyes, from the most minute and transitory aesthetic experience to the most fully developed art-works. The object of this brief chapter is to point a wholesome moral. For, at least in the contemporary art culture of the Western World, no mind is so pure that it may not from time to time purge itself of cant.

The present age has witnessed an extraordinary development in a man's ability to dissect being into hitherto undreamed-of particles. Sir Thomas Browne wrote prophetically when he declared the possibilities of microscopic to be greater even than those of telescopic study. We have at last come to understand that a body grows truly vast not according to its proximity or mass, but according to the parts into which we are able to divide it. Thus we should actually derogate from the grandeur of art to imagine that it requires mass to acquire nobility. The seeds of all art lie in fact in every human breast; and its elements are simply the all-pervasive substances of life. Genius according to evolutionary philosophy remains still human. Even the vast timber cannot deny that the underwoods are also trees.

Of all the characteristics of art the most salient is beauty, and no one has ever supposed beauty to be art's singular possession. Nature no less than art enriches our aesthetic life. Without appreciation of nature no art-life would be possible, for even the musical composers, who work in the most abstract medium, have, as all students of musical biography are aware, invariably been persons of wide as well as of intense aesthetic sensibilities. The usual pictures of Beethoven under the tree are doubtless feeble art, but may well be taken to symbolize a useful truth. Those of us who are disposed to ridicule

the prints may at least find sermons in them if not beauty; and recall Beethoven's own devotion to landscape, so rapturous indeed that he declared himself far more a lover of trees than of men.

Every artist must have a peculiar zest for some forms of life, choose whichever he will. Thus William Beebe and the late W. H. Hudson have selected above all else to be lovers of many varieties of birds, and have transfigured a part of their devotion into some of the most memorable paragraphs in the literature of our own age. Bernard Shaw, with the possible exception of his realistic art, enjoys nothing so much as to observe, and to comment informally upon, the myriad foibles of English manners. The Javanese women, who dye their cloths with such a radiant harmony, must have eyes that see more than the cloth and paint pot. To create beauty in one form it becomes necessary to love it in a thousand.

Some persons are deaf to the beauty of sounds; some blind to that of color; some obtuse to that of words; some have no appreciation of good cooking; and still others, as Lewis Carroll observed, have no sense for a pun. But all persons have some power of expression, and some appreciation of life. Hence all persons are artists. To be a man is to be an artist, although unfortunately not to be a good one. Hence the enthusiast inverts the terms and declares: to be an artist—this is to be a man.

It remains the power of the greatest art to prostrate the soul in wonder, to crown our spirits with prolonged ecstasy, and to lift us to the stars. The greatest ecstasies of art must be built however upon that which is generically human and commonplace. Thus art's gates lie open for all life to stream in. Surely we need fewer stuffy and more open-air doctrines of art. To speak figuratively, art is to life as a sudden illumination that

bursts over a leaden sky or sea; an unexpected tang or sweetness felt in the common air. I suspect that my Oriental friends will some day tell me that art is symbolized in those temples of the East that lie like gorgeous summer houses exposed upon all sides, commanding vistas of long roads winding up to them from the low valleys. No wonder the proletarian theorists on hearing Pre-Raphaelite doctrines of art in the *fin de siècle* wickedly aspired to drag soiled boots over the floor of the shrine mistakenly declared to them to be art—to introduce crudities of nature into an effete chamber. But these were the mere distortions of art lying sick upon her couch, turning in despair now to one side and now to the other. "Art for art's sake," "Art for life's sake," became the cries of persons equally deluded as to art's real nature. For all great art must of course be ecstasy pure and sufficient within itself, as it must also be a fruition of nature within the mind and a true and serviceable daughter of the life that conceives it. Freed from self-conscious contortions and doctrinaire theories, the status of art actually stands serenely justified. To put the matter in a phrase, art is the temple of nature. Itself a genuine identity, it also serves the flame of life.

The technical difficulties and the emotional excitement of art, not its essence, caused us to falter under its burden. It can indeed never rightly be understood till we know it to be homely, till we feel its springs welling upward from life's depths. A painting by Giotto or Renoir, for example, can yield its meaning only to one who realizes it as a summation of a myriad of his own observations of significance in color and form. What familiar and homely emotions the music of Beethoven arouses! Notwithstanding Tolstoy's perverse judgment, one may well believe that no more humane art has ever been composed than the great symphonies, the third, fifth, sixth, seventh

and ninth. It remains of course true that the music-going public has a very imperfect understanding of these compositions, while only a small portion of mankind has so much as heard of them. Yet they mean emotionally, to those capable of appreciating the musical form, precisely that which stirs in the universal heart of man. Their language may be thought difficult; and their meaning is inexhaustible. But in essence they are merely colossal variations upon the simplest themes of life.

The great artist will always stand not only above the crowd, but above his interpreters and critics. I do not for a moment mean that great art need be popular, or even intelligible to the average man. I wish simply to stress the thought that it has no other subject matter than the monotonously repeated formulae of our human nature, and no other psychological technique than that basically common to all men.

The attitude of the well educated enjoyer of art towards a great artist and his work must then, if conditions are normal, show many contrasting elements. The works of the artist may honestly overawe him; he may entertain for them the very highest devotion. Nevertheless he will shun that false (and often hypocritical) devotion which regards the masterpiece and its creator as superhuman. Much as educational convention teaches children to repeat formulae of devotion in instances of persons and ideas which the children can in no degree understand, a most unfortunate social convention leads persons quite obtuse to the more arduous works of art to regard them with superstitious reverence. They are unhappily taught to expect that they will not understand art, and are so far trained to revere its mystery that they become unable to perceive even its simplest meanings. This false type of regard no happily educated lover of art can possibly entertain. In spite of his devo-

tion to genius and its works, he will take comfort in the thought that he himself, being a man, must be something of an artist, and that the genius in art cannot advance beyond humanity.

In the realm of our artistic education the two contradictory vices, timidity and presumption, neighbor each other. The misguided student either fears to approach an art-work, or attempts to reason or to hypnotize himself into a state of enjoyment which in fact he is unable to attain. Neglecting the inexorable law that aesthetic appreciation must in the end be intuitive, he endeavors to force his mind beyond its abilities. Few sights can be more pathetically humorous than a group of conscientious persons vainly attempting to appreciate a work of genius from which, presumably, no real inferiority holds them aloof, but want of familiarity with the style of the art-work before them and with the cultural conditions under which it was produced. Lacking training or incentive for the study of history or technique, they bring desire to an illusion of fulfillment, and actually consider themselves to have mastered an appreciation of works to which in reality they remain strangers. We suffer as much from thinking too well as from thinking too ill of ourselves. In schools children are not infrequently taught to tremble before art; in clubs and the circles of the literati, adults often conceive that they have reached art's esoteric meaning. Each error might be avoided by simplicity and frankness and a little knowledge. In the quest of aesthetic development we must ever be on guard that we are neither more nor less than ourselves. We must be remorselessly clear as to when we do or do not share the ideas and enthusiasm in laudatory criticism of an art-work.

I have expressed the foregoing opinions not only because of the principles involved, but because of what I

consider to be in our own day their practical value. I have myself both studied and taught in American colleges. There I have observed, coming from the influence of the preparatory school and the home, students whose attitude towards classical literature is often painfully subservient. They remind me of children or animals who associate a particular place with some fearful event which they have once seen enacted there. Forever after it is impossible to drag them to the spot, so strong is the memory of the terror instilled in them. Bad education (and much of our education in art is inevitably bad) accounts I believe nine times out of ten for inability to make headway in appreciation. Naturalness and sincerity appear the rarest of all virtues. Insincerity closes the springs of art.

In confirming the liberal attitude towards art in general, it may be well to select a single art for the purpose of examining its roots in the popular consciousness. Since every art has its incipient and vulgar as well as its supreme forms, it makes in fact little difference which is taken for discussion. Nevertheless some ponderable reasons weigh, it appears to me, in favor of literature. Let us then examine the shoots and undergrowth of that art which culminates in a Goethe or a Shakespeare.

All the values that can be found in the works of literary masters may also be found, of course in greatly diminished form, in the language of every man. Not that we always conceive language as an art. A learned and technical paper, for example, may have no trace of style. The author may have experienced no pleasure whatsoever in the choice and arrangement of his words. It remains distinctly possible however that he may have found some aesthetic pleasure in the unfolding of his ideas. Where pleasure in style is missing, one frequently encounters pleasure in composition. Science often af-

fords intuitive and "dramatic" discoveries, where it forgoes the luxury of "literary" language.

The written word is but little more likely to be art than the spoken word. When a grocery clerk tells his customer that two cans of beans, one dozen apples, a pound of sugar and a package of dates come to a dollar eighty-five, we encounter the verbal art, if at all, in its most rudimentary form. But the same clerk may have on occasions a highly effective manner of speech. No one should be surprised if an Irish grocery clerk at three dollars a day were actually quite as able an artist in words as a scholar in comparative philology. The scholar himself would of course be the first to be conscious of any such eminence which might exist. Were it in this instance a case of the plastic arts, we might, indeed, conclude very differently.

To return however to literature. Although the city presses may be expected to "groan" with the weight of millions of trite and artless words daily, the reader of the daily newspaper, to be sure, occasionally encounters an idea really well expressed. I may profoundly dislike the manners of a "headline artist," but be forced to acknowledge his cleverness in the use of words. "Peaches mellow; Daddy sour."

Let the student of aesthetics, for purposes of further experiment, take down from the shelves of a library the Pre-Raphaelite periodical, *The Germ*, and compare any tale in it with a narrative in the current number of the magazine *Adventure*. In what sense may the two stories be said to differ? No element essential to the effectiveness of the one will, I believe, be found entirely lacking in the other. The language, composition, emotions, ideas will of course in the one case be much less involved than in the other. Within its own simpler laws the popular story, however, may have quite as great excellence as the

exotic tale. Its form, for example, would probably have seemed insipid to the readers for whom *The Germ* was published. Yet form the popular story of adventure undeniably possesses. Formlessness is always prejudicial to enjoyment. The more cultivated readers simply demand an increasingly ingenious structure. To enjoy mere form alone, on the other hand, always implies an aesthetic decadence. The Alexandrian rhetoricians as clearly represent a decline in literature, as the Athenian sophists a decadence in philosophy.

Finally, we may ask ourselves whether the readers of *The Germ* more ardently enjoyed their periodical than the readers of the magazine *Adventure* to-day enjoy theirs? It cannot justly be claimed that the more modern magazine is read merely as a pastime. I have seen the captain of a college football team, a man of a huge physical appetite and, on looking at him, one might have supposed of no literary appetite whatsoever; deliberately forgo a meal because of a desire to read to the end of a story in this magazine. Could readers of *The Germ* have boasted, I will not say the same, but an equivalent sacrifice? One might however vouch safely a thousand times for the complete literary sincerity of the reader of *Adventure*. When enthusiasm becomes our point of comparison, it may be feared that even the greatest of the classics must meet strange companions. Do we as adults enjoy Virgil more keenly than as children we have enjoyed the books of the nursery? Or need a shopgirl find less pleasure in her sentimental story, than a classical scholar in Euripides? These questions lend, I believe, a sobering tone to the literary problem. I have of course no wish to destroy what are commonly known as literary standards or to deny the capacity of genius to fix its stamp upon art. I very largely accord with orthodox views of literary values.

The common man, however, has often been too superciliously treated by the critic, who has in the end reaped the fruits of his own pedantic attitude. While genius stands secure, many generally received notions as to the hierarchies of readers are, I presume, more soothing to an elect few, than accordant with actuality.

We shall frequently have occasion to note the sagacity of artists regarding their own craft. This appears notably in their almost unfailing willingness to accept the idea of genius, yet their equal willingness to pick a gleaming fragment out of the dust. On the one hand it is impossible to believe that Shakespere failed to admire the genius in North's *Plutarch*, a work which he so closely follows in his own Roman plays. Dante bowed to Virgil; Virgil to Homer. I can think of no poet who has seriously entertained a levelling view of the history of his art. Artists may for some reasons be obtuse to the works of many who are commonly regarded as masters. But the idea of *der Meister* all artists possess.

Poets, however, where their own practice of art is concerned, appear as no respecters of persons. Shakespere so loved his art that he discovered, it seems, more gusto in a popular catch or ballad than many of his commentators in his collected works. His plays abound in phrases taken from the streets. A like catholicity may be found even in the verses of *The Divine Comedy*. Musicians have, similarly, composed an enormous amount of their work on the basis of popular art; and many famous painters have seriously regarded the taste of peasants. A study of the poets reveals their pleasure in works which numerous critics would pass by with the Levite and the Pharisee. Poets have paid the common man the splendid compliment of imitation. On the contrary, Mr. Paul Elmer More and Professor Irving Babbitt (most learnedly illiterate gentlemen!) give, so far

as I can recall, no evidence in their writings that they ever have read a daily paper. But Mr. Thomas Hardy does not disdain to stoop to those in low estate; and surely Shakespeare would in this regard have done in our age as he did in his own. Literature is too humane a field to tolerate the purist.

I can find no reason for concern over the definition of literature. Our minds should, I presume, be too much occupied with realities, to be overmuch occupied with names and symbols. Whether the term literature be reserved for the masterpieces of other days than our own, for all works of literary genius, or for *belles lettres* generally; whether it be used to signify all written language whatsoever that aspires to art, or whether it be taken in its literal sense merely as written language—surely is an affair of small importance. Students of art should be the last persons to quarrel over terms. Nevertheless without being pedantically precise, we may reasonably object to the word having five or more meanings at the same time. Personally I have absolutely no preference regarding the sense in which the term is used.

With the thought behind the present chapter however we may, I think, be much concerned. Just as people busily at work in a room fail often to realize how stale the atmosphere becomes, highly intelligent persons of literary habits often fail to note that under the influence of austere and dogmatic criticism, as for example that of Matthew Arnold, the air, instead of becoming rarefied, becomes obscure, and the summit of Olympus, buried in clouds. To remain utterly natural and sincere, to accept genius only as it earns its way to head and heart, and never merely as it is trumpeted by fame, to follow critics without stupidly leaning upon them, and to honor artistic merit irrespective of persons, in the least pretentious and the most unexpected sources—this virtually constitutes

a counsel of perfection, whose demands perhaps not a single modern man can truthfully say that he has fulfilled.

To appreciate or to practice an art successfully one must be prepared to assimilate ideas from the least as well as from the most promising sources. A great part of the wisdom of the artist lies in realizing how precious may be a trifle. We must keep all the avenues of experience open. The *littérateur* must not confine himself too narrowly to books, the painter to colors and forms, or the musician to conventional music. The poet should regard the rhythms of nature and even of machinery, as did Whitman, finding here as well as in his library the sources of his inspiration. The painter will do well to listen to the music of the ocean surf, and the musician to love the contours of trees. To observe not only all beauty in art and nature, but that beauty as reflected also in the aesthetic experiences of all men; to respond sympathetically to society; in a word, to live richly: this alone constitutes the ideal background for the cultivation of any art.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE AND THE ARTS

SINCE ensuing chapters will deal increasingly with literature, it may be well at this juncture to consider its peculiar abilities and disabilities, and its place among the arts. We shall in turn examine the characteristics of its subject matter and of its form, and the most fruitful interchanges of thought between poets and their comrades in other varieties of technique. For in the historical no less than in the mythological world, the Muses have, of course, delighted to consort with one another.

An artist occupies a most advantageous position who includes among his comrades not only numerous practitioners in his own art, but many in other arts as well. No classical period in any art shows, I believe, the other arts in actual decadence. Moreover certain notable qualities in imagination and taste the arts of any culture may be presumed to have in common.

While realizing the notion of the basic unity of all arts, however, the artist and his public must sense the unique conditions that each medium imposes. Either to practice or to enjoy an art it becomes of the utmost importance to acquire a feeling for its peculiar qualities. The silk, marble, glass, iron, jade, bronze, silver, clay or gold worker, for instance, should, as we all know, be consecrated to the study of the substance in which he works, till it becomes really precious to him, and he finds himself not so much expressing himself as aiding the soul within his medium to become that for which nature

seems to have intended it. Thus Chinese porcelain animals appear not merely as animals, but as puffed up and hollow, which indeed they are. The colors of a screen are defiantly opaque; the forms sculptured in translucent jade as soft and refined as the exquisite material itself. In the case of man-made instruments a similar, though not the same, condition prevails. The musician may, it is true, study his instrument with the aim of improving it mechanically. Nevertheless, given an instrument in a certain stage of development, the artist attempts to compose for it or to produce from it such music as it alone can give forth. Again, the composer or leader must know the possibilities of any group of instruments, as quartette or orchestra, and demand of the group that which it alone can accomplish. Similarly the first requisite of the poet, or artist in language, is that he shall feel instinctively, even to some extent study philosophically, the possibilities of language. If he is wise he will not ask of language that it shall give what architecture, sculpture, painting or music give. If a poem is praised for its lofty architectural structure, its chiselled statu-esque form, its brilliant word-painting or its musical qualities, we must, if we accept the commendation, understand the phrases as half truths only. The poet, we infer, has excelled in certain features of his own art that belong legitimately to that art and to that alone, yet stand in special relation to predominating qualities in other types of imaginative expression.

I shall order my analysis of the distinctive qualities of literature under the two heads of subject matter and of form. At the outset however it must be acknowledged that little can strictly be predicated as impossible in any art. How forms of expression may satisfactorily be altered or combined, can never certainly be foretold. What leads artists to compose, what reality lies behind

their symbols, or, given a certain subject matter, what symbols will be used, must always remain to a great extent mysterious. Thus music may at least appear to be inspired by what might be thought an object wholly foreign to it. The composer, staring at a keg of nails, may abruptly produce a theme. A rarely felicitous expression in words may arise at the suggestion of a few notes of music, or, perhaps, from a patch of white on a cow's forehead. Thought is too well known to be woven of indiscernible symbolical threads, to enable us to state dogmatically what art a given background or subject matter must of necessity produce. We can deal only in probabilities. The ancients of course were denied the privilege to write of tin cans, vitamins or radios. But a powerful genius, like John Donne, may break every conceivable law of the aesthetics of his own age (the Elizabethan) and yet succeed. Nothing is more true of art than that no one can foretell what the moderns will do. We stand always upon the brink of the unknown.

From a metaphysical point of view the chief distinction of literature lies in its peculiar ability to entertain the most comprehensive ideas of time and space. I select the case of time for somewhat detailed consideration. A series of paintings or sculptured forms may, it is true, suggest the passage of the years. But literature expresses these ideas more easily and more often. Consider, for example, the picture of a tree. How shall the painter depict it at any other than a single moment of time? Of course a detailed literary description of the growth of a tree might easily become intolerable. Nevertheless the idea can more deftly be hinted in words than in pictorial forms. Let us take some further illustrations. True, in many of the portraits of Rembrandt's men and women the shadows may at any moment seem to start, and enact in mysterious dumb show a drama of the years. While

the more literal-minded Holbein painted character as static, the romantic master painted life as it unfolds itself through time. Again, in many paintings of the Nativity we have symbols suggesting both the entire life of Christ and history of mankind. Behind the manger we see, perhaps, the ruins of Rome, at the side of the infant the signs of his Passion, and above, a few faint forms symbolizing the Father in glory. Here the literary elements in painting have been developed to a most unusual degree. Yet we feel these elements, I believe, less vital to the total meaning than they would become should the medium be that of words. A highly suggestive pictorial art, as that of the Japanese, probably suggests better than our own, ideas of becoming. Not the spring alone, but the coming on of spring; not autumn only, but the passing of the year, find expression in the Oriental paintings. However, when all is summed, it must be confessed that the pictorial arts excel in expressing specific space and motion, and literature invariably in expressing time. Music also suggests motion much more readily than it actually suggests time. No art, considered as a whole, enjoys the expansive freedom of pure poetry. The relation of these problems to drama I shall discuss in a later chapter.

We shall however find the logic of literature a more fruitful ground than its bearing upon metaphysics. Words are our basic symbols for rational ideas. At one pole, to be sure, philosophy more nearly approaches art in its form of architecture than art in its form of words. Mathematics, geometry and symbolical logic appear far less dependent upon language than, let us say, ethics. In the larger part of philosophy, nevertheless, words may be regarded as utterly essential in creating whatever further symbolism the subject may demand.

A purely rational mode of thinking we have seen to

be inimical to the realization of art. In so far then as philosophy pursues a rigidly logical or scientific method, it must be distinguished from the art of literature. The report of a commission to investigate housing conditions among miners in Northumberland would presumably contain many pages that no one would consider art. Enumerations, substantiations, necessary matter of many kinds emphatically non-literary, would crowd its pages. On the other hand many utterances intensely imaginative and distinctly veracious have actually been recorded on this theme. So in the pages of any philosopher. Large sections in Plato, in Kant, in Spinoza cannot, it is true, be termed art. Yet one may seriously hold that many of the greatest and most sublime passages in literature may be found in the philosophers. They too have their intuitions, their ardors and their moments when form and subject become essentially indivisible. Indeed philosophy may be regarded as an arduous path to the most exalted heights of poetical expression, supplying material superior even from the aesthetic point of view to that of emotions uninformed with ideas.

If one were to judge of the nature of poetry by the typical lyric relegated to the bottom of a right-hand column on daily editorial pages, one would, to be sure, infer poetry remarkably innocent of ideas. Romantic conventions of the last century, and the growth of literacy among groups still most superficially educated, must chiefly account for this unfortunate condition. A study of comparative literature reveals, however, that the proportion of the writing which deserves to be called art in the works of the indubitable philosophers very closely approximates the proportion of the writing which deserves to be called philosophy in the works of the indubitable poets; and that in each case the fractional element is a large one. Some

ethical philosophers, like Nietzsche, may be thought of entirely as poets, while some poets, like Dante, with good cause have thought of themselves largely as philosophers. Although persons of literary inspiration have always been disposed to honor the naive in poetry, whether simple and impassioned, as in Homer, or also supremely sensuous, as in Theocritus, on the whole they have preferred as the masterpieces of literary art works in which a very considerable amount of rationalistic thought is assimilated. So it has been from the times of the Athenian culture to our own, and so it will undoubtedly remain till the art of literature disappears. No other art expresses these ideas with a comparable facility.

The kinship of literary art to philosophical and especially moral ideas leads us to the relation of literature and history. Just as we must regard any notion of hostility between literary art and metaphysical ideas as among our *pseudodoxia epidemica*, or vulgar errors, we must similarly regard the notion of hostility between that art and history. Like philosophy or science, history may be supposed to have its non-literary pages. The notion of fidelity to what has actually been thought and done in the world does not, however, preclude historical writing from becoming literature. We have seen art to be a stage of consciousness mediating between the dream and the awakened state. Even this description of art, however, need by no means prove inimical to history. Without falsifying his subject the historical writer may legitimately cultivate a style that gives art's vividness to his subject. History in a sense becomes all the more real for being a dream. Moreover the historian must be singularly aware that no scholar deals in more elusive materials than he. From faded ruins he reconstructs a bygone civilization. Who then requires more imagination? Man's dreams form no less a part of his discourse

than man's material acts. Thus the synthetic and ideal historian may be regarded as the synthetic and ideal poet, since each mediates equally between dream and reality. Turning from theory to practice, we find that those writers who have attempted to preserve the memory of the past have, like the philosophers, been at times poets and at times not poets. Small sense for literary form, to be sure, may be discovered in most of the chroniclers of the Middle Ages. Since the rise of a scientific method in history, a new element, often non-aesthetic, has at times entered the field. Nevertheless historians of our own day have by no means disavowed the practice of literary art, nor is it to be anticipated that they will do so in the near future.

So intimate is the tie between literature and history, that it may fairly be said that only with the greatest difficulty can any literary work be composed without heavily borrowing from historical notions, and that a large proportion of the art appears permeated with historical and geographical ideas. Poets and artists of all descriptions have a fondness for looking towards even the remote past. Where the historian has described an epoch, the orthodox poet depicts an episode. In so far as literature is story, it might almost be designated as a shorter form of history. History has on the whole dealt somewhat more with the palpable and external in life than literature, and shunned life's more elusive aspects. But literature in turn we may recall to be of all the arts the most specific in the meaning of its imagery. Should it develop along narrowly subjective lines it might indeed soon widen the gulf between history and itself, although under these conditions historical writing would presumably show some bending in the same direction. We may, however, conclude with the generalization that while history aspires to literature, literature leans upon history.

When at work on the same material, the historian is merely one who as a rule demands more facts than the poet before producing his art.

Our society is cemented by language; our laws, creeds and counsels, all recorded in words. Hence literature naturally rises as the supreme vehicle for the expression of distinctly social ideas. Its nature may at once be seen agreeable to this purpose. In the active world we can, with an unhappy facility, dispense with the other media of art, architecture perhaps excepted. When we desire an object, we neither paint it nor carve it nor sing of it, but frequently are obliged to name it. Because of the fecundity of its imagery and the rapidity of its movement, speech has been found the most effectual and economical of the forms of expression in practical affairs. To this end indeed language seems largely to have been born. Thus when the artist selects such affairs for his subject matter, he is more than likely to turn to words. He may perhaps reach spiritual or subjective depths more quickly in music, or in other of the arts. But he finds in words a most natural vehicle for the expression of our social life.

Were I asked to select the poet whom I regard as possessing the keenest sense for the nature of words, I should be much tempted to name Aristophanes. No poet had better right than he to depict the weighing of words in hell. Aristophanes' theory of Comedy seems to have included the thought that the comic scene could best be laid wherever words flew. Among the assembly of women, in the law courts with men, in the market place, in the courtyard with the philosophers—in these and similar scenes, where tongues by nature fly fast, the great comedian places his characters. His *dramatis personæ* are all great talkers. The meaning of the plays of Sophocles might conceivably be expressed in sculpture; that of the choral Aeschylus in music; that of Euripides

in the art of a shrewd portrait painter. But can any man conceive the substance of Aristophanes in any other medium than that of words?

The thought of Aristophanes readily leads us to consider the relation of literature and humor. Humor I should hold to be more easily expressible in words than in any other art form. Here we may well make a distinction. Mirth appears a more subjective and elusive quality than humor. He who laughs must have a specific subject for his laughter. But whoever feels his being flooded with the high wine of mirth needs no definite object on which to fix his attention. He carries his glee within. All but the most unmistakably painful objects suffice to sustain his mood. No art, I believe, can begin to express mirth so well as music. Mirth flies with Ariel-like wings, while humor lards the lean earth with Falstaff. Ariel sings; while Falstaff talks.

Poetry, the romanticists tell us, aims to create a mood. So, no doubt, does all art. Yet one suspects this statement of overemphasizing perhaps the least characteristic phase of poetry. The nature, abundance and rapidity of images in literature point to this as the most specific of the arts. We look for more given detail in literature than in either sculpture, painting or music. And the utilitarian hardness which, wish as fondly as we will, becomes ingrained in words, will hardly be softened by romantic incantation. The poet has no other choice than to use the medium that is given him. He finds himself in the position of a metal-worker, who cannot expect to manipulate his medium as he would manipulate clay. I do not of course mean to imply that words by their very nature convey accurate ideas. Indeed no! They are among our most deceptive forms of communication. But a certain hardness they do, at least in my experience, acquire. It would be a mistake to feel for them as for the tones of a

violin. After all, words are the chief vehicle of rational ideas and social communication. Hence, harsh as the conclusion may appear, I cannot avoid the thought that many of the romantic young ladies who write lyrics and practice Chopin would often do well to write fewer lyrics, and to practice their Chopin more diligently.

On the other hand, I am well aware that we are here on controversial and distinctly treacherous ground. The past, I feel sure, is with me; but we can have no such assurance of the future. The cult of expressionism, by far the most interesting of the modern literary movements, has declared copious, unexpurgated and boldly figurative expression of subjective experience to be the future ground for literature. In defense of this contention the radical movement points to such brilliant and even amazing work as *Ulysses*, with its seven hundred pages of Rabelaisian-Freudianism. Here we have much to allure us to the new style. In its release of energy and fascinating involutions, it combines European power with an Eastern freedom from banality. Moreover, it possesses intellectuality of a high order. Nevertheless one hesitates, and inquires what it profits us to mine so curiously and even morbidly into the depths of personality. We question if impersonality, even with the possibility of less abstruse discoveries, may not in the end prove the more desirable course. The earth, Landor observed, is arable only a few feet beneath the surface. May not the new art, we query, be unwise as a general literary program, art taking its cue here from science without sufficiently weighing the distinct purposes of art and science? Are not the rich depths of our being actually expressed by music, without the danger of probing self-consciousness? Is not music the voice of the soul? One seriously questions whether here literature is not at work in a region better cultivated by other arts. At least

until more authors of as superb ability as Joyce arise, we may, I think, reserve judgment as to the probable or desirable course of literature in the immediate future. My own inclination is to wish expressionism long and prosperous life, but not empire.

Many of the literary radicals of the present day will, I believe, feel complimented if one refers to them as writing nonsense. This was once a term of abuse, but the times have changed. Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll and W. S. Gilbert, with a handful of others, chiefly Englishmen, have introduced the world to one of the most fascinating of the types of literature. Nonsense, having all things potentially for its subject matter, has nothing—or should we rather say, having nothing, possesses all? In its ideal form nonsense attains complete abstraction. Here we are confronted with a far-reaching and fascinating aesthetic problem. Despite the tendency towards the emphasis of pure style in modern painting, no real progress has been made from the classical pictorial idea. Landscape and anatomy have at times given way to fruit, water-jugs and tablecloths; but the objects are still recognizable, and even studiously portrayed. A few artists have used purely geometrical forms, but this again merely introduces decorative figures. Moreover, most paintings in this manner are declared to be representational or allegorical. In the decorative arts derivative figures from nature and symmetrical patterns have proved the rule. Nothing can be more uncommon than a serious approach to genuine freedom. Such an approach may at times be seen in the glasswork in medieval windows, or in Javanese batiks. In nonsense literature, however, one senses no pattern of intention or idea and no genuine representational value. The individual images have sparkle but no meaning. It is as though a glass painter, unable to cut his fragments to satisfy his taste, should

break a large sheet of glass upon the floor, and use such fragments as chance thereby provided. Who can predict the future of nonsense?

Having examined the types of subject matter for which literature may be considered distinguished among the arts, let us now examine its formal characteristics, so far at least as the two prove distinguishable. Here we at once encounter the difference between the written and the spoken word. It appears of small account whether or not we read aloud much even of excellent prose. With poetry, however, the mental ear hardly suffices. A poem becomes a very different and far more significant work when we actually attempt to give our mental impression a vocal form, or when we hear it well read. On the whole I should consider the exercise of reading aloud in private more valuable than that of passive listening. Even when we have a most inadequate notion of the sound of our own voice, the act of vocalizing gives us an intensified mental perception of the nature of the poetic form; while in listening even to the most adequate reading of a poem, we commonly experience less ability to idealize. As we become ourselves more creative in temperament, we become, I believe, less satisfied with other persons' renderings of verse, and more reliant upon our own. Dramatic, of course, gains more even than strictly poetic, language by public recitation, but requires a very special training. Thus it will be seen that, at least so far as certain types of literature are concerned, we may properly speak of two arts—the written and the spoken word. Nevertheless for our further discussion it will be unnecessary to distinguish between them.

On considering the relative value of form and subject matter in literature and the fine arts, we must recognize the superior position of subject matter in language. The distinction, to be sure, is much more easily felt than

analyzed. We should, however, proceed to an explanation somewhat as follows. In sculpture, painting and music the meaning achieves a considerable independence of the subject matter. Ideas appear less specific and more abstract. Thus portrait sculpture has rightly been considered an inferior art, even to realistic portrait painting. The sculptor, even if he use a model, will generally aim at an idea larger than is readily localized. If he executes a bust of Beethoven or Napoleon, for example, his work will be more idealized than that of the painter, and far more than that of the novelist or poet. The painter, in turn, often builds a universe of color and form virtually independent of his subject matter. A hillside and a female figure may equally express his idea. It makes little difference which he selects. So with Renoir and Monet. The moods of the former often appear quite independent of his theme, and surely the last century produced few greater painters than he. Monet paints countless times the façade of Rouen Cathedral, but never does it appear to him the same. He paints, not the cathedral church, but ideas of light. The actual building might readily, for all that his art exhibits, be totally lacking to him in literary associations. And of these canvases we might almost declare that he who loves them not loves not painting. Music still more generally than painting works free of a specific subject matter. The pure emotions themselves may as a rule be taken for its background of literary meaning. In other words, the ideal musical composition has the same background as Collins' *Ode to the Passions*. When, therefore, we say that in literature subject matter is relatively more important than in the other arts, we mean simply that there subject matter forces itself more sharply to our attention. We are conscious of interpreting precisely the subject which the poet sets before us. A mountain, a woman, a

cathedral become unmistakably themselves, in their own locale and their specific relations. Even the apparent exception of allegory exhibits the same specificity. However general the final synthesis in a work of literary art may be, we recognize its parts to be both significant and actual particulars.

And here we are confronted with a paradox. The art which in subject matter is most specific, in form appears most vague. This condition may be explained in that form in the fine arts yields its meaning with more immediacy than in literature. Words have more vulgar and specific value, but less apparent beauty. Seeking to create pure and austere form, the poet discovers that he writes at all times upon sand. His medium, as we have already observed, will not yield to the finest manipulating. Words are at once too specific in allusion, and in spiritual meaning too vague. The indefinite medium denies the perfection of line that we encounter in the plastic arts and in music. This does not, of course, mean that rugged or even exquisite aesthetic form is impossible in literature, but simply that because literature so readily conveys particular images and emotions and suffers an appreciable embarrassment as to form, we naturally turn with slightly lesser interest to the meaning of the form, and with greater interest to that of the subject.

Literature undoubtedly enjoys more power to convey non-aesthetic sentiments and emotions than any other of the arts with the exception of music. The cause lies, I believe, in large part in the relation of the literary and musical experience to time. Music, drama and literature may all, to be sure, be analyzed in the study. We may go through a musical score, pausing after each phrase to consider its structure. In rehearsals a play is continually interrupted, and each actor put through parts of his role separately. In the study also we may lay down our book

from time to time, or pause at the conclusion of sentences to weigh the thought of the author. Nevertheless music, drama and literature are intended to be enjoyed aesthetically only as we experience their works *in toto*. When we analyze them we have little opportunity for enjoyment, and when we enjoy them, small chance for analysis. The continuous flow of aesthetic experience—in drama and music often for hours, and in literature itself in some instances even for longer periods—creates an intensity of illusion, an accretion of excitement, and sensibility to passionate feelings scarcely expressible in painting and plastic art. Rousseau, for example, would have been denied the opportunity of expressing the emotional values of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, had he been either architect, sculptor or painter. Yet Schumann expressed much the same values in music.

The story-teller says to the child: "Once upon a time," or "Far away and long ago," or "Now listen to the wonderful tale of the little tin soldier." At once the child, and to a considerable extent the narrator himself, are lost in a world of dreams. The illusion continues from first to last. Even the most critical and philosophical reader of literature similarly resigns himself to his book. Although he may make occasional comments in the margin of his mind, he perforce reserves his more serious reflections till the end. "Judge not the scene until the play is done," has rightly become a maxim of the theatre, applying in only a lesser degree to all poetry. On the other hand, let us enter an exhibit in any of the principal art dealers' galleries in Paris or New York. One observes a group of highly critical students examining pictures with much care. These persons remove and put on their glasses; approach and retreat before a canvas; study first one corner of it, then another; inspect the brush strokes; consult the time of day; whisper to one

another, and sit down, waiting perhaps for the light to change. Or consider a picture as it hangs on the wall of a private house. The owner studies it in all unusual lights; knows it by returning to it a thousand times; and feels its influence to some extent upon him at all times. (A book, however, undergoes something akin to a burial whenever placed upon the shelves.) A building stands for centuries towering above a city. People take fleeting glimpses of it, and sometimes catch at their hearts with joy at a particular glory in which on a certain hour of the day or night it seems magically bathed. When the humor in the breast conspires with the atmosphere of the sky, the structure suddenly leaps into inspired meaning.

While literature and music are, then, illusions which we accept for certain definite periods of time, to lay aside or to criticize when the period of acceptance comes to a close, the works of other arts lie continually exposed before us. The pages of Chartres never close, and our pathetic will is that the volume remain open as long as man's pilgrimage endures. It is our privilege with such arts at one and the same minute to criticize and to enjoy. They yield quite as poignant moments of experience as music and poetry, and, under favorable conditions, rain upon us a quiet, imperturbable and star-like influence. We learn to observe towards the arts of pure form one set of values, towards music and literature another. While the lovers of the former cultivate a mood in which analysis and enjoyment simultaneously aid each other, lovers of the latter retain, even after they have achieved strong critical powers, something of that self-abandonment which the child experiences when he hears the magical words, "Far away and long ago."

Thus far I have attempted to describe the chief differences between literature and the fine arts. Writers, like all other artists, must, as I have said, be keenly aware

of the peculiar possibilities of their medium. Yet they may likewise be expected to draw special inspiration from their sister arts. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, once more taking English literature for purposes of illustration, I shall indicate some of the most striking instances of affinities between literature and the arts. Let us first take certain poets who, still largely successful in their own art, approach the typical spirit of architecture, sculpture, painting, the decorative arts and music.

Although Dante stands as the supreme poet inspired by the scholastic tradition that created also much of the world's greatest architecture, several English poets also, if carefully studied, disclose the influence of the architectonic phase of medieval culture. Of these I should mention first Orm, who expresses much of the Norman spirit in the religious life of the Middle Ages, and second, Langland, whose poem voices the spirit of English gothic. The one builds a massive, sober structure of strictly theological imagery and ideas; the other audaciously synthesizes religious, social and political life in a realistic masterpiece full of bold surprises, grotesque irregularities and hard contrasts of light and shade. The student who knows his Lincoln Cathedral, must also, at least from the aesthetic point of view, know *Piers the Plowman*. Moreover, the decorative imagery of the cathedral, that is, its iconography, is all but identical with the essential imagery of the poem.

English gothic sculpture had not as yet come into its own during the age of Orm. By Langland's time, however, it had even passed its classical period, and descended into that curious state, a bizarre naturalism. The reader must confess that not a little of this temper may be discovered in Langland's style. The English poets, however, who chiefly suggest to us sculpture flourished in the age of Flaxman; and for one of the greatest of

them, indeed, Flaxman executed one of the best of his monuments. I refer of course to William Collins. The poet's finest work is chiselled as cleanly and skillfully as that of the sculptor. Again, Pope's unsurpassed gift for meticulous form in literature suggests sculpture. For this is the most perfect of the arts, as architecture is the most abstract. Cowper, especially in his Odes, achieved almost an equal faultlessness. The Olympian repose and grandeur of the greatest of sculpture none of these poets suggests, for their age found its most characteristic expression in a literature of manners rather than in a literature of dream. Nevertheless an Horatian sense for form, akin to the lesser achievements of classical sculpture, these neo-classical poets most satisfactorily recovered, at least so far as the genius of the English language permitted.

A critic of the relation of painting and poetry in England might at first be tempted to a study of such poets as Rossetti and Blake, who were themselves painters. On the other hand, is it not of more significance to consider the relation of a great poetry to a great, than to a somewhat inferior, painting? While Blake and Rossetti, it is true, were painters of a moderate genius, their own works in this art by no means compare with the greatest of Renaissance figure painting, which stands behind Spenser and Milton; or even with the greatest of modern landscape painting, which stands behind Wordsworth. Two arts have rarely enjoyed a happier spiritual union than painting and poetry in the Renaissance. To conceive Milton and Spenser without the imagery of the painters, is almost as vain as to gaze at a canvas in the darkness. Their poems are radiant with the color, softened with the shadows, and informed with the imagery and ideas of the paintings of the age. That the pictorial art flourished chiefly abroad rather than in England itself, seems not in

the least to have embarrassed poets endowed with such marvelous strength to assimilate, and quickness to perceive. The later landscape art was indigenous, and if on the whole less impressive, the same may be said of the poetry of Wordsworth. The affinity, nevertheless, becomes scarcely less marked. The portrait may be regarded as the most literary of the phases of painting. This type, however, shows painting approaching literature, while in the allegorical and descriptive poets we feel that poetry approaches painting.

One of the most brilliant periods of European music accompanied the rise of Romantic literature. In the lyrical spirit of Shelley and in the apocalyptic spirit of Carlyle, we recognize two phases of literature approaching this art. No one, I suppose, seriously doubts that the romantic spirit has more effectively expressed itself in music than in words. If one wishes that some among Shelley's followers could leave his medium for that of Chopin, one may be permitted to wish that Carlyle and Richter had actually been able at times to leave words and to express themselves in music. The decline in modern lyrical poetry and the weakness of much so-called "poetic prose" are, I feel, largely due to the inability of the authors to grasp the significance of language, and to their fondness for employing it with a purpose similar to that which music so triumphantly fulfills.

Lastly we may glance at some historical relations between literature and the decorative arts. The more austere arts in England steadily declined throughout the later Middle Ages. During the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, however, the decorative arts reached remarkable heights. Window-painting, embroidery, tapestry-weaving, wood-carving, metal-work, costume, etc., were zealously cultivated. If the results were often lavish, they were nevertheless at times splendid. Precisely

the literary conditions that might be expected prevailed in this period. Poetry lost its philosophical vision and its emotional depth, but developed a vast linguistic facility and ornateness. To the myriad churches of glass erected throughout the kingdom, Lydgate responded with his *Temple of Glass*. This was the age of the "aureate" or gilded style. With all its charms, it abundantly exemplifies the rule that the arts tend to rise or to fall in common. Neither English art nor literature can in this period be called great. Imagination flagged, and taste was perverted. The passion for pedantic and geometrical forms in art left its trace upon the weaker phases of the style of John Lyly. From this decadence Spenser, Marlowe and Shakespere delivered English poetry.

It may conceivably be urged that the medieval scholastic poets as they approach architecture too often grow frigid; that Pope would be more delightful if he were less like Flaxman; that even Spenser and Wordsworth at times describe too much; that Carlyle might have done better if he had had a gift to compose music; and that fifteenth-century poets would have been wiser had they torn themselves loose from the fetters of a too powerful tradition in decorative art. Holbein, Hogarth, Raeburn, Du Maurier brilliantly succeed in their own art, and yet at the same time suggest literature. The masters of literature also succeed while suggesting painting and the other arts, but more often, it seems, are guilty of mistaking the finer possibilities of their own medium.

What authors of English verse or prose should we mention as the surest in their sense for words? Had Chaucer everywhere sustained the level of his *Prologue* or of his *Troilus and Criseyde*, we might without hesitation declare him to be the type of the purest literary master. In numerous of his pieces, however, he falls, as Lydgate a generation later, injuriously under the influence

of decorative art. The epic, the drama and the novel have, I think, been the most successful of our strictly literary forms. The lyric without the aid of music appears to thrive less satisfactorily with us than in the Orient, where language has developed greater power for suggestion. In our bolder tongues the larger forms do best, or, in other words, achieve the most unmistakably literary distinction. Indeed Poe's too celebrated dictum on the supremacy of the lyric is even less convincing than the statement that our songs as art must be superior to our symphonies. Thus of all our masters in literature Milton, Shakespere and Fielding appear to me the most wholesomely dependent upon words. True, Milton continually suggests the painters; Fielding resembles Hogarth; while some remarkable music has been composed under the inspiration of Shakespere, and his stories have been found to retain considerable effectiveness when told in the moving pictures. Nevertheless I consider that of all English writers these may well be taken to have possessed the most innate feeling for that which words and words only can effect. In them we see the ideals of European literary speech fulfilled. For they are unburdened by structural pedantry, overconsciousness of technique, superfluous description, vagueness, or elaboration. All are hospitable to ideas, and take their subject matter sincerely; while at least two of them are intimate with manners, gifted with humor, and keenly aware of language as actually spoken by the people. In short, in these artists all those qualities of form and subject matter which I have described as peculiarly the characteristics of literature are subsumed. These, like Aristophanes of old, are masters of words, on earth, in heaven or in hell.

CHAPTER IV

LITERATURE AND DOGMATISM

My object in the present chapter is to show how naturally the critical attitude arises towards both the art and morality of literature, and what conditions elevate such an attitude to heights of intense dogmatism. I shall discuss modern, expansive scholarship as a force that alleviates this dogmatic intensity. Finally, however, I shall attempt to show that even the most detached scholar will hardly regard literature without retaining something of the critical and moral points of view, his ideas merely sobered and enlarged by his wider range of discourse. We may first consider some primary incentives to the criticism of literature as an art.

The student who to-day seeks a theory for the growth of criticism should not, I think, begin with any axiom or abstraction whatsoever. Let him rather employ the biological and evolutionary methods of modern thought, and begin with the spontaneous cry of the child. Suppose a child of three years. His mother has begun to retell him a story which he has already enjoyed. But in the midst of the narrative he arrests his parent with a loud bawl, at the same time expressing his preference for another story. In the bawl of this child lies, of course, the germ of every literary critique which has graced the pages of *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, *The Athenæum* and *The Nation*. In this inarticulate expression of disgust and desire lie enfolded the seeds of all future aesthetic and moral judgments. For purposes of our

study it is unnecessary at the present juncture to make a sharp distinction between the two planes. Let the reader however keep his mind chiefly on the aesthetic point of view.

Should we add no fundamental prejudices to those determined by our earliest inheritance, we should have ample foundations on which to build elaborate structures of aesthetic criticism. To these first prejudices, altered by the years, we add new attitudes, and refine, analyze and justify the result by rational thinking. It becomes as natural to the man to play with ideas as to the child to play with blocks. He generalizes his notions of taste, and readily erects vast systems of criticism. He becomes also a propagandist. That he should follow this course proceeds most naturally from the conditions of his being.

Man instinctively realizes that in most, if not all, of the phases of his life he is in fact a creature of society. He depends for the major number of his pleasures upon the opinions of those about him. If, for example, no one agreed with me that Shakespere was worth knowing, I should not only be deprived of the opportunity of seeing his plays on the stage, but the owners of *The New York Times* might conceive the frugal notion of confiscating all editions of the poet, to remake the salvaged paper into real-estate supplements. If an infinitesimal number alone thought the Canyon of the Colorado worth visiting, it would remain buried in inaccessible deserts. Even where persons have a most imperfect rational conception of their dependence upon their neighbors, instinct leads them to defend themselves and their views

From this dependence it may be objected that the artist to some extent frees himself. Yet even the artist never lives wholly in his own dream. His very instinct as artist leads him to the wish that he make himself understood. Perforce he compares his own style with that of his

fellow craftsmen, and generally sets up some theories in self-defense. He desires not only to bring his children forth, but to protect them in the world. He hopes to find them well received. An artist rarely enjoys the theoretical detachment which his position affords him, and seldom lives strictly by an inner light. On the contrary, in his opinions of art he is generally to be found among the most hotly contentious of men. Thus even the most subjective and mystical of all English poets, William Blake, had in the innermost chambers of his heart a passionate desire to save mankind through his artistic ministry.

Literary culture can hardly be said to have promoted a spirit of meekness among mankind. The poet seeks fame for himself, declares the god Apollo to be of his party, and the story of the Python to be an allegory of those who differ with him in his literary opinions. It is by no means whimsical to observe that his medium lends itself with singular facility to hard-hitting abuse. Other artists may aspire to quarrel, but only the literary artist possesses the ideal weapons of offense. One architect cannot cast a cathedral at another; a sculptor finds stones cumbersome missiles; and even a paint-brush has its limitations as an object to throw at an opponent. With words the case is altered. While the child of necessity contented himself with the bluntness of a bawl, the philosopher barbs his arrows with keen and deadly syllables.

The superior prominence of literary over other forms of aesthetic criticism, however, is not owing alone to the more effectual equipment of its participants. Society feels instinctively that more of that which it deeply regards is here at stake, than in discussions of any of the sister arts. For literature, above all other of the arts, embodies man's social ideals: those religious, moral, legalistic and utili-

tarian notions upon which the piers of his social structure rest. Language is the most apparent vehicle of our common conversation. Thus literature becomes an enormous factor in sustaining or in altering the practical world in which we live. To touch literature is indubitably to touch the scheme of values which upholds society upon its course. Hence it comes about that while much of literary criticism is on aesthetic themes, the larger part has unquestionably been moral. Furthermore, the relation of literature and morality has proved one of the most perplexing problems in the entire realm of critical theory.

Considered as a pure art literature cannot, of course, be moral. The aesthetic experience has invariably been defined as a moment of self-justified pleasure, delight varying from serene romantic reverie to romantic ecstasy. Whoever remains ignorant, as did so many of the Victorian writers, of the tremendous force of the distinctly aesthetic element in literature cannot for a moment be said to have grasped its essence as art, and one of the greatest claims, if not actually the greatest, by which its existence can be justified. Literature we have already considered as an art, and consequently to some extent as a dream, an illusion and a visionary splendor. But to arrest our description of it here, as so many critics to-day are inclined to do, is to fly in the face of invariable facts. The pure aesthetic experience is in truth a mere convenient abstraction, for which experience affords not a single example. Thus even in the midst of the most ecstatic music or literature, we cannot wholly shuffle off our critical and commentating nature. In a fleeting whisper we remark to ourselves that this or that is well done, or this or that not so well done. Again in literature our moral sense never completely slumbers. An art of words must be peculiarly sensitive to moral ideas. While our ethical

feelings may not crystallize into hard generalizations or cold dogmas, they will nevertheless remain to some extent alert. Defining morality as the problem of the desirable and the undesirable in human life, literature on the whole appears hardly less an exercise of the moral than of the aesthetic nature. We perceive its enormous force in swaying our daily thoughts and acts. Let us now briefly analyze the moral factor.

Where we are the most detached from a poet's theme, we are least sensitive to the moral significance of his work. The contentions between parties in a tribe of Amazon Indians recorded in their poetry will not, one presumes, arouse such acute sentiments in the breast of a modern European reader as a novel based on the social ideas of the Russian Revolution. Nevertheless the poem, one observes, was in its inception clearly moral. The reader who is to enjoy it must to some extent recreate the social and moral conditions from which it arose. And even the anthropologist will be unable wholly to divorce himself from a sense that certain of the forces represented in the poem are closer and more sympathetic to his own heart than other of its forces. Saturated in the description of human life, the poem cannot at any time be wholly divorced from its moral elements. Moreover, we may observe in passing that biology and other forms of science may of course be highly suggestive for morality. Mankind has rarely been treated to a heavier dose of moralizing than in Maeterlinck's *Life of the Bee*.

As further introduction to our theme let us examine *Beowulf*, the earliest of English poems. Through the clouds of allegory and legend the reader unmistakably perceives two giant forms, Nature, with its frequent cruelty, and heroic Man striving to overcome its assaults. Now as of old the frankly sympathetic reader takes the side of man, grieves for the Saxon men as they toil in

the dangers of famine, fire and the sea, and rejoices in the elemental triumphs by which their lives, and thus our lives, were sustained, and their desires fulfilled. At the basis of morality lies the struggle of the human race with unfriendly Nature. The thorough-going pessimist, who regards annihilation as supremely desirable, holds indeed towards such a work a peculiar attitude, but by no means an unmoral one. True, many persons enlightened by our present culture have lost interest in these struggles of elemental life. To them birth and death are, if I understand rightly, tiresome subjects of discourse. But this is merely equivalent to saying that they have lost sympathy with *Beowulf* and with all such elemental literature. The story of Helen of Troy will presumably appeal to them more. My contention is not that everyone has an ability to enjoy *Beowulf*, but that all who actually do enjoy it will have some feeling for its moral element.

The art of literature has illogically been declared hostile to morality because poets so frequently discover their friendliness with power, and deny their sympathy for the downtrodden. This is of course merely to assert that some poets embrace another than the Christian morality. Blake, for example, declared all poets to be on the side of Satan. Many of Milton's critics have observed that the poet drew evil more skillfully than good; and have further suggested his secret leaning towards the devil's party. Nietzsche wrote that all the greatest artists in an impartiality to good and evil have anticipated the Superman. But even Blake, as I have already indicated, cannot truly be called unmoral; while Nietzsche, reaching "beyond good and evil," merely desired new morals for old. The poets, we must confess, are often partizans of ruthless vigor as against weakness and sentimentality. Schiller's emphasis upon what he took to be the dramatist's Christian morality in *Macbeth* must, we now

generally suppose, undergo great revision. But here again we have no evidence that poets can strictly be called unmoral. They show as a rule as keen a sense for social ideas as for the purely abstract beauty of form, or the ecstasy of aesthetic illusion. If they have less frequently than other thinkers proved severely dogmatic, they have nevertheless in their mirror of the ever-shifting drama of human life abundantly betrayed their partialities. They too have realized man's ever-various problem of happiness, and have indicated tentative positions. Thus it would be merely perverse to maintain that Shakespere, his superb tolerance notwithstanding, had as high a regard for Caliban as for Prospero; that he thought Osric to be as noble a being as Hamlet; or that he viewed impartially the morality of Edmund and of Edgar. Because Shakespere's moral sense vastly transcended naïveté, we should not deny its existence. A blind worshipper of no mortal man or creed, and no romantic idolizer of unreal dramatic creations, he appears to have admired impartially the strength figured in Macbeth and the compassion that ultimately stole over the heart of Hubert. No one mistakes the sentiment of the poet when Desdemona praises Othello's nobility, or when Emilia decries his criminal folly. With deliberate skill he distinguishes strength from weakness in such figures as Brutus, Antony and Coriolanus. Although Shakespere was too sincere a poet and thinker falsely to simplify the problem of life, that his works are in any strict sense unmoral it would, I think, be absurd to contend. He leaves this most ironic of problems as we must in the end all leave it, unsolved; but every page of his drama throws some new light upon the prejudices of the poet and of his race.

Because literature can never be wholly moral or dogmatic, severe moralists often view it with distrust; and

indeed common sense requires us to be continually on guard that a master of literary form does not make the worse appear the better reason. A poet may select one side of a case not because he believes the position just, but because the choice accords with his material advantage and affords him the more favorable opportunity to display his art. Like John Dryden, he may deliberately withhold evidence, and falsely simplify the facts. Indeed it remains a sober matter of history that literary genius has been impartially employed in behalf of ideas that we should presumably regard as good or bad. Although poetry is saturated with moral ideas, it can hardly be said to have been on the side of the angels. Poets are above the average of mankind only in so far as they are more intelligent. But intelligence carries with it no patent to wisdom; and Shelley was dangerously near puerility when he declared that poetry was the divine guardian of man. In his *Defense of Poetry* he wrote that the art of literature had liberated men from what he regarded as the dark ages of European history. He neglected to add that the same art had enjoyed an equal share in creating the conditions which he decried. Literature, to conclude, is morally little better and no worse than humanity as a whole; but cannot possibly be denied one of the principal sources of our moral ideas.

If this may be concluded of *belles lettres*, much the same may also be said of the literature that blossoms upon the thorny stem of science. The mathematical method itself has little direct kinship with literature. When, however, the political scientist approaches the end of his stony ascent and looks back upon the panorama that lies beneath him, he will presumably feel impelled to expression at once genuinely moral and literary. Even academic scholars at times voice their prejudices in ringing words. The ardor of a pure scientist at work in his

laboratory of physics demands literary form to be objectified satisfactorily. Every activity that becomes a temporary or a permanent end in itself calls by reason of its own nature for the voice of art. For art gives still further self-sufficiency to the experience. The works of Fabre, for example, are replete with scientific, artistic and moral values, and invite a criticism of all these phases.

Thus far we have seen how thoroughly in keeping with the nature of literature are oral and written discussions of its art and morality. It will also be worth our while to examine the special conditions that from time to time bring both aesthetic and moral criticism to the greatest heights of dogmatism and asperity.

The facts may boldly be summarized by saying that those persons are the most dogmatic who have an ax to grind. The artist who actively strives to heighten the valuation of the school of art and thought in which he labors and believes; the social class that attempts to strengthen its own position; and the reformer who frankly works to reshape social institutions: all have eminently dogmatic views of literary art. In other words, while passivity makes for tolerance and impartiality, activity makes for dogmatism. Those persons whose vision is the most restricted by the culture of their age or class, or by limitations of their own personality, will presumably be the first to emphasize a dogmatic position. Occasionally we meet with critics so obtuse to moral ideas, that their dogmas on literature are almost wholly of an aesthetic nature; and with others so blind to impressions of form, that their opinions are almost wholly moral. A class or age, however, will as a rule incline to a more or less dogmatic attitude simultaneously in the two fields. Thus we have ages in which acute dogmatism holds the fort, followed by ages of comparative skepticism or detachment. Both aesthetic and moral standards,

for example, have suffered a decline in emphasis in our own age of relativity. We are as artistic and in many cases as moral as ever, but each author follows either his own light or the light of some one of the numerous parties which have set up their critical banners. Obviously there is no such unanimity of critical opinion among the cultivated classes of Europe to-day, for example, as in the time of Pope.

Startling indeed are the differences between the eighteenth and the twentieth-century poet or scholar. The earlier scholar was, to be sure, at war with an insurgent Grub Street, an incipient romanticism and democratic propaganda, and, more often, preyed upon an enemy of his own species. For the most part all polite authors knew and accepted well defined standards both in art and morals. Their strife merely reflected an effort to keep their standards pure. They asserted the rights of an established order of taste and social privilege. Beyond their own age they seriously honored the taste and morals of but one period in literary history, namely that of Augustus. Here they discovered unimpeachable rules for all that was to be thought and said in the world. Virgil was himself Nature. All important literary types had been cultivated by the Romans. A gifted author had only to believe, to study and to write.

The problem of dogmatism has of course undergone a vast change since the generation of Pope. After a romantic school almost as assertive and universally received in its own day as the neo-classical school had been previously, came the deluge. At present neither the Augustan, the Byronic, nor indeed any two or twenty schools of artistic and social criticism hold the field. Our armies appear torn into a thousand factions. Moreover, no thinker worthy the name is convinced with anything remotely resembling the conviction of Pope, or

even that of Shelley, that he has discovered the true aesthetic or moral path. We have largely discarded the notion of strict literary types. To the Latin classics were first added the Greek, then the European languages generally, till we have recently witnessed a reaching forth even towards the literature of the Orient and the languages of the dark continents. In the eighteenth-century sense of the word we have no classics, since the modern artist is invited either to take his literary model where he will, or to produce a radically new invention if he can. The journalistic critics are perhaps a little less ferocious than of old. But the orderly tournament to decide who should wear the crown bequeathed to the ages by Virgil has changed into a mere riot, where each contestant informally bats his nearest neighbor over the head. "My dear Wells," writes Mr. Jones ironically; and "My dear Jones," ironically replies Mr. Wells.

While certain authors and the vast majority of journalists are thus contesting among themselves for the applause of the market place, the scholars in their towers have won a new power for detachment. At least ideally speaking, they are without an ax to grind. They have not themselves practiced or championed in public any of the contemporary literary modes, nor are they chiefly concerned with distinctly contemporary problems. They acknowledge no literary fealty to the crown of imperial Rome. Unlike the Augustans, they do not conceive a present age to be a time of peculiar enlightenment in literature. Although, as I shall later emphasize, the use for aesthetic and moral dogma still remains, scholars are disinclined totally to scorn any period of culture. All ages do not please alike, but none is rudely cast into the discard. Under these hitherto undreamed-of conditions, a new philosophy of art and literature is arising.

It becomes increasingly clear to us that modern schol-

arship, to make the best of the means at its disposal, should in general remain free from the services of any cult, artistic or social. Its best promise lies in a wise aloofness, modestly inquiring of all, deferring judgment, and, in a word, adjusting itself naturally to the highly favorable conditions in which it finds itself. The modern scholar has no need for asserting critical and moral dogmas after the grand manner of the eighteenth century. Well may he be awed by his material. He has so much to know, and to enjoy, and, if he rightly understands his position, so little incentive to intrude judicial opinions.

Let us first examine his position in the field of aesthetic criticism. The Augustan scholar conceived himself born under a law of letters which it was as treasonable for him to deny as to deny the right of his sovereign. There is no use in arguing such a case to-day. It is most openly apparent that we are bound to no such law.

The modern literary scholar perhaps to a greater degree than any type that has lived before him in the realm of the intellect deserves the title of a free man. Scholarship has placed new kingdoms and continents at his disposal. He stands under no obligation to bow before the works of any single group of masters, such as those who gathered about Augustus. He no longer confers corporal punishment upon the children of letters. Just as science has taught us that life is a composite of smaller and smaller particles, so the modern philosophy of literature, while enhancing rather than derogating from the supremacy of literary genius, has taught us the positive value of the works of lesser men. To an age that has revealed wonders that lie even beyond the reach of the microscope, no life or art seems wholly despicable. We have learned to regard every genius as synthetic, much as our bodies are now considered synthetic. While the somewhat pedantic criticism of the eighteenth and

even of the nineteenth century affected to regard minor writers with contempt, the modern scholar knows that no man deserves utterly to be contemned.

The modern scholar is the free man. He may look whichever way he please; the world lies before him. He has no more incentive to quarrel with a feeble author than with a dry stick lying on the forest floor. The great timber is above him; the mountains loom before. They will presumably hold his longest gaze. Yet with no thought of condescension he may lower his eye to a shrub or fern. These too, in a humbler way, are part of the vast scene that surrounds him. To fill the cup of thought to overflowing becomes his first and keenest desire.

The intensity of critical prejudice in the eighteenth century brought into the domain of aesthetics an ardor which might be supposed to be confined to the moral sphere. It is, indeed, a strange commentary upon our human nature that persons should actually have wrangled over the question whether or not *Hamlet*, aesthetically considered, is a good play. Still, if we are not to take our pleasures seriously, what shall we take seriously? This bitterness which characterized so much literary debate would, however, seem distinctly foreign to the premises of the modern scholarly ideal. We know too well the changes in taste, to contend fiercely over eternal verities in criticism. Experience discovers to us that the vulgar must be nourished on vulgarity, the educated upon a finer art. Just as the theatre naturally breeds strife, since everyone will have a slightly different idea as to how a play should be produced, the library of the scholar breeds peace. The scholar is encumbered with no urgent problem of activity. He has before him not ten books but many hundreds. If a lover of literature were to go into exile on a remote island where no books could be had,

and he were allowed to take only a satchelful with him, he would give his all to have only those which would yield him the deepest satisfaction. Even if a similar danger were actually present in the Middle Ages, the problem has ceased to hold its venom to-day. The modern man may read what he likes, and create what he can. There is no reason in the world why he should be contented with the world, but at least the world lies very largely at his disposal.

Under these conditions what incentive has he to assault the literature of broadsides and journalism, and to entertain the position of the purist? It would be mere cant to pretend that the scholar himself wishes always to be on the heights. As I have already observed in discussing the springs of art and literature, all great artists, as Beethoven, Shakespere, Rembrandt and Dürer, have at times stooped to pick up a neglected jewel from the dust. Every artist has his sketchbook as well as his portfolio, and every reader, his books for relaxation as well as his books of intellectual grandeur and ecstatically beautiful form. Far from debasing his taste, the catholic reader actually strengthens it by allowing it periods of less exacting effort. The petty writer enables us to perceive in scattered and often more easily discernible form a few of the myriad cells of imaginative thought of which the works of genius are composed. The imagination is one faculty, whether it expresses itself in a nickname or in a tragedy, a chord or a symphony. Science as conceived by Darwin, psychology, history, anthropology, and perhaps we may add the advancing years, have taught us a less cocksure attitude towards Grub Street. We no longer conceive the state of art as a war between good and bad, but as an evolution from simpler to more developed forms. Moreover, he who has read the complete works of half a dozen writers of the first literary

genius may easily have read enough inferior writing for a lifetime. There are enough juvenile verses in Shelley, commonplace lines in Wordsworth, and inferior scenes in Shakespere to give any student a fair notion of what this mediocre world of ours produces when the fires of genius do not burn. To the detached scholar the world's literature will be imagined as itself a cosmic drama in which the masterpieces of poetry constitute the chief scenes, and lesser works the intermediate passages. If Shakespere himself may be imagined as speaking to the players, we may look upon Horatio addressing the soldiers as honest old Heywood, and upon the sprightly scene between Polonius and Reynaldo as an embodiment of the witty soul of Thomas Middleton. Although we shall wish to reflect a hundred times upon the master to once upon his associates, these are still not so inferior as to be neglected altogether.

The scholar of our own age will presumably take as catholic an attitude towards the moral as towards the æsthetic phase of literature. In the eighteenth century the art and morality of the Middle Ages, for example, were equally decried. In our own retrospect we are likely to be more sympathetic with this as well as with other periods once deemed unenlightened. The moral world no longer appears a dualism of good and evil, as the pietistic Christian conceived it, nor of good and bad manners, as the third Earl of Shaftesbury so elegantly described it. We perceive a more tangled skein, finding more light where earlier critics found shadow, and more shadow where they found light. We dream riddles of life and death which neither Thebes nor Twickenham knew. Life appears to us to-day far more the wondrous enigma that it seemed to Shakespere, than the open book that it appeared to Ben Jonson. In morality as in art we are less given to dogmatizing on the theme of the unchanging

good and bad. The scholar considers, but rarely decides. He has, upon the whole, preferred play to combat.

Several important factors have of course arisen to make the fair dream of modern scholarship more often a fancy than an actuality. It is by no means my purpose to discuss contemporary and localized conditions which so often have blown a sordid dust into the face of the ideal as theoretically embodied in academic life. The intellectual seraphim have not of course as yet alighted upon earth. But a more general and less intimate problem lies before us. To the scientific spirit fertilizing scholarship the modern development has in large part been due. Both in aesthetics and morality science has come as a new factor altering to a greater or a lesser degree our entire outlook. The force which in Newton's day made for dogmatism now unquestionably makes for tolerance. To science then the scholar ultimately owes most of those conditions which cause him to look with relative satisfaction upon his state and prospect. Nevertheless the idea of breadth, which I take to be the chief and most enviable contribution of our own age to literary culture, has at times been seriously combated by science itself. Scientifically inspired methods have not only opened to us new chambers of the past, and a knowledge of cultures at present existing in the less familiar quarters of the globe, but have created a new doctrine of specialization. The very hobbies scorned by Pope and Samuel Johnson have become the serious pursuits of thousands of modern students in research. To such an extent has the impulse for narrowly concentrated research been carried, that we may conceivably come to the point where we shall actually have no more scholars, but only (alas the day!) authorities. The mere prospect of a multitude of authorities each grasping a minute problem, one for example in Egyptian hieroglyphics, and another in Australian jour-

nalism, leaves a solemn but somewhat depressing effect upon the mind. Dogmatism of the older school would under such conditions have faded away. But one can more readily look with equanimity upon the dogmatic opinions of the eighteenth-century gentleman, who at least specialized in a civilization, his own, than upon a host of students specializing in minor literary topics throughout the ages. Our modern ideals under the admirable instruction of science frequently promote such minute investigation. But we should do ill to cast away the prospect of creating a new spiritual culture, to reap only the knowledge gathered in the prematurely dust covered files of the publications of the Modern Language Association and other admirable research organizations. Conditions of modern knowledge and society offer hitherto unimagined opportunities for distinctly personal culture. "The Complete Gentleman," for so Peacham described him,—will it one day be said that the seventeenth century, with its incalculably greater limitations, actually achieved this ancient ideal more fully than we, with our vastly greater opportunities? I am truly fearful; and must confess the modern scholar as I have drawn him more a vision than a reality.

A certain measure of detachment may of course be attained by any person who studies his own age alone, but studies it widely. Shakespere, knowing little Latin and less Greek, achieved, from purely the humane point of view, a more catholic attitude than any of his contemporaries. Again, the scholar and specialist who dwells upon some remote period may experience a purgation from severe dogmatism analogous to that which the really widely read man attains. The contrast between the life of his own day, which to some extent at least he must live perforce, and the life of the land and times into which he passes as he crosses the threshold of his study,

will leave a deep mark upon his nature. Nevertheless there is no substitute in the literary life for a genuinely catholic scholarship. Just as a man seems never to know beauty while he pursues only one phase of art, but after he has acquired an understanding of many instruments and arts, at length learns the force of the universal concept, so we shall hardly glimpse the deeper aesthetic and moral values of literature until we have drunk the meaning of works from many periods of culture. Neither the ability to compile learned articles, nor the facility to expand commonplaces into graceful essays, promises in itself substantial good for our civilization. For the modern scholarly ideal ultimately demands both liberal subjects for discourse, and an increasingly philosophical spirit. What we feel as the shortcomings of our criticism are thoroughly typical of our age. The weakness of science as applied to art must always be its comparative reluctance to distinguish means from ends, mistaking technical skill for interpretative power.

In contrast to the scholarly ideals immediately preceding it, our modern thought is, then, chiefly notable for its spirit of detachment. Indeed among those constitutionally too weak to stand the wine of the new ideal, we commonly find a superficial and too articulate agnosticism. "I," as a stiff-bearded, very solemn and god-like man remarked to me the other day in one of the New England cities, "I am the president of the atheist society!" Like the magical soldiers who guarded the fleece of gold, unnumbered critics arise to deny all aesthetic standards in literature, and to advance a levelling notion of the art. Such an opinion, as I have already remarked, perhaps no man of genius has ever seriously entertained. Although we may well question whether philosophy can be said to have discovered anything which may properly be called a universally binding rule in art, that art is now great and

now mean, now the work of genius and now that of mediocre intelligence, we shall not seriously wish to deny. And even in the welter of changing tastes and fashions, some guiding principles may perhaps be discerned. These will of course be chiefly deduced from our definitions of art and literature. We shall ask ourselves whether a poem appeals to us seriously as to both its form and subject; whether it is art in the sense that it has something of the quality of the dream state, combined with phases of our more rationally organized, waking consciousness; and whether it belongs more truly to the art of words than to another art. These ideas I have formulated in preceding chapters. There is, however, a point in critical sagacity of considerable moment here, which I think worth our attention.

I quarrel with no man's enjoyment or want of enjoyment. My purpose is only to discover generalizing factors in what readers and critics have actually recorded as their experience with art. The question therefore shapes itself as follows: are the critics actually in agreement upon certain matters? When may they expect their ideas to pass undisputed; and when should they show their good sense in realizing that their opinions will soon be challenged and never widely accepted? These questions may all be answered in a simple logical formula. When like is compared with like, the critic is on comparatively safe grounds; and when like is compared with unlike, on grounds extremely perilous. To compare like with like is the chief discretionary maxim of literary criticism.

This statement may readily be illustrated. Let us first consider the problem of good and bad art where the difficulty is least, that is, in comparing the broadly similar works of a single writer. During the last three centuries Shakespere has been regarded by some critics with superlative admiration, and by others with merely luke-

warm approval. No reader, however, has, at least to my knowledge, recorded that he has read *Pericles* with more pleasure than *King Lear*. The unanimity of opinion here must largely be accounted for by the comparative similarity of the two pieces. Without even assuming any peculiar excellence in the case of *King Lear*, its confessed relative superiority to *Pericles* supplies a most serious difficulty for the thorough-going agnostic in aesthetic opinion.

Let us take another and somewhat bolder illustration from the same period of our literary history. I shall select a case largely hypothetical so far as criticism is concerned. Among the numerous pastoral dramas in English three, I believe, excel all others: Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess*, Jonson's *Sad Shepherd*, and Milton's *Comus*. Imagine, if possible, any number of persons well acquainted with this province of literature, and even suppose them ignorant of whatever criticism has been written in the field. A large majority would, I feel sure, agree to the superior excellence of these three compositions. As to the capacity of the pastoral drama to please when viewed in relation to literature as a whole, however, we have actually received the most various judgments. Where the critic may safely compare *Comus* with, let us say, Glapthorne's *Argalus and Parthenia*, it would be perilous indeed to compare it with *Macbeth*.

We may safely declare the supremacy of Pope and Dryden in the heroic couplet, and of Shakespere and Fletcher in dramatic romances. We need fear no contradiction in holding Cowper a supreme master of the *sinfonia domestica* in English poetry, as George Crabbe in realistic verse. No one, I presume, would challenge such opinions. If, however, we should state that we preferred Augustan to Romantic literature, or *The Way of the World* to *The Dynasts*, half the world would be

sure to disagree with us. If we were in fashion one season, we should be out of fashion the next. Man has no means of satisfactorily adjudicating such cases. The qualities in question are like the elements, abiding and shifting throughout the ages, as do the continents and seas. We have at length discovered that once when land at New York appeared as a mountain, the Rocky Mountains were beneath the sea; and later when the site of New York was beneath the waves, those mountains were lost in clouds. All regions of the world have witnessed countless migrations of ideas; mysticism, materialism and all primary types of thought shifting like sand from shore to shore. We cannot take sides and cheer our party in such conflicts, as we should cheer at a club meeting or an athletic contest. Such forces can only be considered under the nicest qualifications and in the broadest and most impersonal manner. One can no more, for example, make a comparative estimate of such admirable poets as George Crabbe and William Blake, than of Phidias and Beethoven. Blake himself wrote that works of the highest genius are always incomparable with one another.

The caution that only like shall be compared with like in estimates of ultimate aesthetic values, supplies of course but a crude and preliminary rule for literary criticism. Whatever value and consistency such a criticism may possess must, as I have said, be founded upon our basic conceptions of art and literature. And these will of course differ widely in different persons. I am well aware, for example, that the ideas on these subjects which I have previously expressed in these Essays can meet at most with only a limited and transient approval. Moreover, most criticism is basically irrational, and merely represents the social contention of two or more forces.

Modern opinions of relativity in morality have given

to all discussions conducted in their temper the same spirit of detachment which we have noted in considering criticism in the domain of aesthetics. It is by no means essential to the present Essay to duplicate the argument; nor do I care to review the grounds for distrusting a complete agnosticism in this field. I shall merely reiterate the observation that the nature of language promises that literature shall always tend to deal with a moral subject matter, and, even more clearly than the other arts, insinuate moral prejudices; and that this will continue to be considered one of its chief phases. Even if personal freedom is held among our most prized prerogatives, some moral standards society must recognize in order to exist. The scholar, too, has his responsibility to society. His position as I conceive it is neither wholly altruistic nor self-centered, Christian nor Epicurean. The scholar's study of the manners and morals of periods comparatively remote both temporally and geographically will, it may be assumed, relieve the acerbity of his own moral prejudices. The scholar of the eighteenth century was serene by virtue of his faith in the current dogmas of his age. The modern scholar or artist should achieve a deeper, more contemplative and more mature serenity by virtue of his new philosophy of time and space, his far wider conceptions and superior aloofness. The scholar of any art to-day seeks primarily intellectual adventure, and only in the exceptional instance rests in his conclusions. He exercises his rational faculties still in part for utility's sake, but chiefly as these assist him to reach a sympathetic understanding; as they prove intrinsically delightful; and as they enable him to build his own temples of speculation. His attitude towards speculation and utility closely approximates that of the pure scientist. He will see details clearly, and also, it may be supposed, acquire some feeling for universal forces at work beneath

the surfaces of life and dimly perceived. The emperors of China spent one day of each year seated motionless upon their thrones. May it not be anticipated that the grandeur of the material which modern scholarship at last has at its disposal will awe the mind into a similarly contemplative attitude? Modern scholarship is the child of science, and mother of religion. Under his given conditions the new scholar may be expected to discover the universe in a dream greater than any moral system or aesthetic dogma.

On thousands of their classical silk paintings Chinese artists symbolized their conception of a scholar's life. A man of mature years sits upon the bank of a stream. A few sharp strokes of the brush indicate the rushing water. A dark rock and pine are keenly suggested at his side; while, inobtrusive and vast, mountains loom dimly in the mist of the background. These mountains, which symbolize the quality of the soul, subtly pass into the olive brown of the silk itself. The silk is the chief element in the picture, as the universe in the scholar's mind. Upon it the few pointed forms are boldly, unforgettably drawn. No spectator can say how the forms are fused with one another into the whole. The silk retains its mystery. The dogmatic impulse that urges man to more than he may legitimately attain has been quieted. Eagerly observing what he can, and poetically conceiving as much as philosophical modesty will allow, the sage felicitously makes himself one with the shrub at his feet and the sun beyond the horizon. Although we discover on our own horizon that which the Eastern artist never dreamed, his ancient ideals of literary scholarship appear at last to have encompassed the earth.

CHAPTER V

THE DEVELOPMENT OF LITERARY TASTE

IN the preceding chapters we have considered the nature of art and the springs from which the artistic experience arises. We have seen the relation which literature bears to the arts; and discussed the ideal of the detached modern scholar devoted primarily to the enjoyment of literature. In our analysis of the literary problem a further topic naturally unfolds itself. We seek to discover, not the primitive source of literary pleasure, but how this pleasure is actually developed, to what extent it may deliberately and successfully be cultivated, and what may be its meaning, not for a scholarly class alone, but for a larger public. Such are the topics which I shall examine in the present chapter. Starting where Chapter II broke off, with a view of the elements of the problem, I shall take up further the question of the aids and disciplines to literary enjoyment common to all advanced cultures, and finally examine some conditions and ideas specially relevant to education in our modern democracies.

That the poet is born and not made, is a maxim only in a small degree less true than that the enjoyer of art is born and not made. How far literary taste is strictly an inherited quality, and how far the result of training in earliest childhood, still remains a problem most imperfectly understood. It seems clear, however, that a person of marked literary taste rarely is found where one or both of the parents have not possessed some unusual

aesthetic development. Taste hardly less than genius shows itself in the dawn of life. One child has promise of the most brilliant aesthetic culture, where even the most favorable combination of circumstances will fail to bring out appreciation in another. Our minds are as varying in their possibilities as the surface of the earth in fruitfulness. As in the biblical parable, some are destined to yield thirty, some sixty and some an hundred fold.

Genius of course is less accountable than taste. The latter may approximately be foretold by the society and the family in which the individual is found. Those who dwell in an intellectual desert will hardly acquire a mild literary taste, although an occasional sport of genius may arise among them. On the other hand, a member of a family traditionally literary in its habits enjoys from birth the most hopeful prospects. He grows up surrounded with persons of literary imagination. The rooms in which he lives are crowded with famous books. He haunts, perhaps, a library containing volumes of his grandfather or great-grandfather or of still earlier generations. In such an environment he breathes the air of letters, and must be an abnormally dull person if he fails to acquire some degree of literary culture. The prevalence of large and old family libraries in Europe, and their relative scarcity in ever-moving, democratic America, is no small factor in the shallowness as well as the modernity of American literary taste.

The love of books presupposes an aesthetic personality and the accessibility of books themselves. Each factor must be taken into account; and beyond these two, all disciplines may well be considered of a secondary and inferior value. A man prepared by birth and elementary training, and given a few good books—these alone suffice to raise the flame of enthusiasm. One book will probably

prove insufficient. Literature rarely becomes a passion till it has first become a habit. A very few good books, however, will serve the purpose. Literary taste is chiefly developed by the reading of more and yet more good literature. The simplest possible conditions may be illustrated in the case of Thomas Chatterton, a poet whom no master trained, and no literary clique raised upon its shoulders. All fires came from within. He was son of an exceptional mother and an eccentric and highly musical father. He was brought up within the shadow of one of the fairest masterpieces of British architecture, the lovely church of Saint Mary Redcliff at Bristol. In an old muniment room, where he had played on emerging from infancy, he discovered what books were necessary to bring about the fatal condition which determined him to be an artist.

Where the development of taste may be accounted for by comparatively simple and external circumstances, the flame of genius leaps into an eccentric and amazing blaze. We customarily think of the literary genius who flourished before the age of public libraries as haunting old bookstalls, while scholarly gentlemen sat placidly reading in their family studies. In the present century the new libraries have largely taken the romance out of the bookshops. Nevertheless I presume that public libraries, museums and bookstalls will always do more to promote writers of genius than any schools or academies. The best institutions to that end are those which bring man and book together with the least fuss and ceremony. On the other hand, the scholar, beyond whatever excellence he may achieve as an individual, still fulfills a genuine social function.

To the poet the scholar can be of small service. In the possible event that the poet is himself a scholar, the scholar can bring to him little that he does not already

possess. The library in any event affords whatever information the poet requires from books, and in the library the scholar has labored chiefly in an editorial or bibliographical capacity. To the public, however, the scholar may prove of substantial value. He objectifies and impersonates for the people the ideal of literary enjoyment. In his mind men recognize the scattered volumes of a library brought together, animated and recomposed. The scholar, then, is of scant inspiration to the poet, but potentially of material inspiration to the average literary person. Moreover, his chief influence must always be of a largely personal nature. The two greatest aids to literary enjoyment are, I believe, first a personal acquaintance with true poets, and secondly a similar acquaintance with true scholars. Henceforth I shall dismiss the case of the creator, and consider only the enjoyer of literature.

We have seen the immense importance in the formation of taste of physical equipment and of inherited and early acquired traits. Literary appreciation, however, may to some extent be educated in the case of the adult. It may well be worth our while to analyze some of the chief provocatives to better understanding, arranging them in what may appear the order of their ascending value. Although what Fielding said of authors, namely that their first business is to know their subject, holds equally well for readers, I shall not discuss that somewhat obvious phase of the problem. I shall consider in turn annotation, criticism, aesthetic theory, biography, appreciation of the fine arts, personal acquaintance with scholars, and a like acquaintance with good authors. These seven disciplines or aids to enjoyment have been known in all literary cultures. Thus an early form of annotation was the glossing of sacred books. The equivalent of what we now read under the name of

literary criticism has in lands less prolific in actual printing and writing than our own, often been relegated to oral expression. Some germs of criticism, however, may be found in the literature of all peoples. Aesthetic theory in earlier literatures has often existed in the guise of metaphysical and subjective speculation. Biography was once largely cloaked in romance. We have become more exact and scientific, but have by no means altered the point of view: an interest in the portraiture of literary men. Since literature has of course never existed as the sole art of any people, the wide significance of the fifth aid becomes apparent. The idea of scholarship is older than literature itself; while the final aid is clearly pertinent to any culture whatsoever. Our discussion then is on firm and permanent grounds.

A scholar can place himself in no greater attitude of humility than in the position of annotator. A series of detached notes possesses no weight in itself. It depends for its meaning almost wholly on the text which it accompanies. It makes little or no pretension to imaginative or synthetic power. Successful notes may be written with practically no attention to literary style. They are usually much richer in sober factual material than in philosophical or interpretative power. Under certain conditions annotation may, nevertheless, become profoundly valuable.

We should avoid either exaggerating or underestimating the value of such work. In the realm of contemporary literature annotation has to-day become almost unknown, except in articles in themselves of a distinctly scholarly nature. We have come to think of the footnote as belonging rather to the domain of science or history than to that of *belles lettres*. Poets rarely, as in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, annotate their own verses. The older poets as annotators often left the

common reader sadly in need of an annotation upon the annotation. William Collins, for example, was particularly fond of explaining his English verses by quotations in Greek. The annotations of the editor as a rule expound a classical text where time makes original allusions obscure, or where some difficult point in biography or philosophy calls for explanation.

The annotator himself works in an embarrassing medium. He directs attention to the shadow rather than to the light on the canvas of the artist. As a prier into dark corners he readily develops the archaeological as opposed to the aesthetic or the philosophical view of literature. His research becomes a science. His capacity for both naïve and speculative pleasure wanes. When, however, we estimate his service to art, we may easily in our enthusiasm be tempted to declare that the last is actually the first, and the least the greatest. The annotator has presumably no ax to grind. He is no windy theorist, and, presumably, no poseur. He never declaims to exploit personal vanity. On the contrary, he gives us that which alone can rescue many a passage in the work of genius from absolute darkness, and which may redeem a whole masterpiece from obscurity. In his own modest way he may be the true hero. He forgoes the temptation to act as a mere mimic of genius. His sword becomes the chief weapon by which scholarship rescues the works of the masters from the injury of time. No art so deeply requires this type of scholarship as literature. Thus the annotator has also a role in the story; like Una's dwarf, who carried her "needments" in his satchel; or we may compare him to that grammarian and writer of textbooks whom Dante met in Paradise, elevated to the stars because he had stooped to the least of things. In humbly following the steps of an author, the annotator further clears the road for the reader; and frequently

proves far more serviceable than the literary critic, too often puffed up with a most untrue theory and a most real conceit. We may nevertheless observe that the spirit of annotation should not be too busy about art. The importunate annotator worries his author without serving him. In substance he commits the unpardonable sin of interruption. Moreover, as we ourselves become increasingly familiar with the works of any author or period, we stand less and less in need of the commentator. Eventually we may dispense with him altogether. When we become virtually the poet's own contemporary and equal in mere knowledge, notes cease to be of significance. And even if portions of a poem remain dark, the work need not therefore be lost to us. Art at best must remain something of a mystery; and whoever regards any poem chiefly as a puzzle, ceases to know it as a work of art.

The words "literary criticism" no doubt suggest to us the most mingled sentiments. In this mid-region between annotation and aesthetics, strange and abortive growths have been multitudinous. Frequently lacking the information of the good annotator, and the clear thinking of the good aesthetic philosopher, as petty as the annotator at his lowest, and as incomprehensible as the philosopher at his worst, the literary critic has fallen into the very limbo of futility. He has written, to use the words of Pope, "about it, Goddess, and about it," missing any decisive point. He has simplified what is by nature complex, and perplexed what is by nature simple. Under the protection of the literary essay he has strayed into fields of which he has had inadequate knowledge, becoming the dilettante philosopher, philologist, psychologist, and historian; an arch-dabbler; a trifler in both form and content; a trafficker in literary personalities; a garrulous and inconsequential gossip upon man's dreams. Can any good come out of Nazareth?

It must be confessed that any literary essay which lacks philosophical method really becomes absurd only as it becomes pretentious. When an age accepts a set of definite dogmas as the basis of its literary opinion these dogmas, it is true, always acquire a certain dignity, not because of their power to convince us logically, but because they have so well answered a general human need. When, however, a writer moved by the impulse of the moment proclaims judgment according to the laws of a private obscurantism, the product of necessity becomes vapid. The appreciative essay, on the contrary, frequently has considerable value as a fresh and sincere record of a man's actual experience with a good book—preferably an experience lasting over a period of several years. Such writing may have charm, and serve to interpret both the poet and his critic. A sincere human document, it can never be scorned with impunity. As a rule less compressed in thought and less impassioned than more esteemed literary types, it still attains no mean degree of artistic excellence.

The chief defect of the critical essay considered as art generally lies in its over-rationalistic nature. Art, we have seen, mediates between our dream and our waking state. The critical attitude has so much of our rationalistic and waking consciousness as to strain the formula of art to the uttermost. The product suffers because it suggests a dream state only in recollection. Panegyric or satire may soon grow tiresome, while downright analysis chills. The formula of the purest art cannot be reconciled with that of the critical essay. Some ulterior motive is, I think, always present in the production of work in criticism or aesthetics.

The Essay then may be moderately delightful in itself, and of use in revealing its subject in a clearer light. Persons ill advised in aesthetic psychology, however,

often place the most fantastic reliance on this type of art. The reading of appreciative essays grows upon them as a vicious and inescapable habit. They devour reviews and never outgrow the practice of attending lectures. They falsely conceive that they can be talked or clubbed into an enjoyment of literature. They fail ever to graduate from the need for a teacher. Once more to use Pope's imagery, every classical author must come to them accompanied by his charioteer, the critic, or they conceive it impossible that he should be understood. They demand that someone supposedly wiser than they shall intercede between them and art. As a preliminary exercise they must take critical oxygen to arouse enthusiasm. They must "approach" a masterpiece by painful degrees. I should, however, distrust any man led by timidity to speak of "approaching" art. Where such an attitude exists little valid and sincere appreciation remains possible. Readers so far awed by art as to find the critic a necessity have become victimized by false cultural standards. They have forgotten that "criticism" as we commonly encounter it to-day is, of course, properly speaking, a literature of confession, not of adjudication. The enormous rise in the mass of essays on literary topics in modern democratic countries reflects the unhealthy condition of the public towards classical art and authors. While the public painfully attempts to reason itself into enjoyment, conditions naturally go from bad to worse. By the greatest and most sinister of miracles, the wine which genius made from water is turned back to its first element.

Generally speaking, the more good style we read, the better our taste will become, and the more mediocre style, the faster it will be dissipated. One ironical consequence of practices familiar among literary students is that the more the students read on the subject of the productions

of genius in mediocre critical and historical authors, the duller their own taste grows. It is impossible for any man to pour into his mind thousands of pages of commonplace prose, and to retain a really fine intellectual and literary sense. His taste becomes vitiated by the element that he lives in. Let him read debased summaries of the classics instead of the works themselves, translations for originals, or prosaic criticism instead of good verse, and the result can never be in question. He will have sold his present and future good taste for a store of barren knowledge and dubious opinion. Informal criticism, as Lamb wrote it, is undeniably charming. Literary histories may legitimately be used as one would consult an encyclopedia. But in diabolic power to ruin literary taste nothing can surpass the work of the uninspired historian of literature.

In passing from the informal essay to aesthetic philosophy, we pass of course from impressionism to theoretical discipline, and from problems of the particular case to that of the highly generalized idea. Certain minds are sure to prefer a more casual, others a more abstract type of thought. Such aesthetic philosophy as we possess at present is, indeed, far from satisfactory to us. The advance in psychology and the renewed interest in aesthetics witnessed in the present century, however, may be thought to augur well for the future. Certainly it is to be hoped that we shall make practical advances in our knowledge of the aesthetic experience and of the disciplines that promote it. The confessedly unsatisfactory results of most informal criticism may safely be attributed to shaky premises. We must build from the foundation; and the foundation of literary criticism can only rest in our understanding of literary values. On the whole aesthetic theory has, I believe, much too often been glossed lightly. It behooves the serious critic to forgo

opportunism, to get down to his main task, and patiently to construct a system of aesthetic ideas. Moreover, the philosophically minded may find here a most valuable discipline for literary enjoyment. While the public at large must always be nourished with softer foods, all hardy and more powerful minds find a chief source of support in a theoretical view of their subject. It is for this reason that in the hierarchy of disciplinary aids I have placed aesthetic philosophy above the appreciative essay. This philosophy, wherever vital, is itself the poetry of poetry, the art of art, radiating its own splendor over all fields of the aesthetic life. The vital philosopher alone is the true king, but, like a king, one among thousands.

Let us now descend to a less presuming region, but one at present more fruitful to the larger number of readers. Biography of men of letters rests upon the well grounded assumption that all great literature is an expression of genius. Behind all distinguished art stands shrouded and blurred the spectre of an unusual man. In subject matter literature is rarely more fascinating than when narrating the lives of the painters, musicians or poets. The themes are intrinsically alluring, and the light cast upon artistic masterpieces by no means inconsiderable. At times a legendary biography may surpass in interest even art-work of high value. Thus the poems of Chatterton, admirable as these often are, seem less marvelous than the poet's life, although this has really never been told with complete success. Again, if necessity compelled, we should probably wish to part with several of Beethoven's minor compositions, before parting with our literary knowledge of the man. In many an instance we discover that we ourselves, as we read the works of an author, are building in fancy an imaginative conception of an artist's soul. We not only demand order in each

work of art, but ask that the total works of an artist shall leave a vivid impression of a personality before us. This impression, often highly subjective, we fondly cherish, carrying it close to our heart of hearts. Such an attitude need have nothing in common with a vulgar hero worship. It represents thoroughly natural conditions. A radiant aesthetic personality illumines a number of scattered pages. Not the book but the man is the source and focus of these gleams. If his friends admired him more than his literary works, why should not we attempt to envisage the source of their admiration? Certain authors we instinctively think of as books upon the shelves. This I believe to be the case, for example, with John Fletcher. To think of Doctor Johnson, however, is to see his gigantic frame and face, and to feel the spell of his presence.

Like criticism and philosophy, biography is itself a type of literature. That it has not, at least until recent times, reached the greatest heights of literary art, few will, I suppose, be inclined to question. Where the literary genius is the subject of the picture, the biographer as a rule writes with a sense of his own relative unimportance. And writers of supreme genius have generally demanded a greater freedom to shape their own ideas than this relatively historical form of writing admits. The genius composes autobiography in masked forms. He is too much occupied with self-expression, with his own age and universe, to undertake conventional biography. Thus it happens that most biography presents to us in relatively undistinguished style and excessive naturalism a story shaped rather by chance than by imaginative design. Moreover, in weak hands its intellectual fibre slackens, and we encounter a mass of episode, anecdote, aphorism and gossip. The personality of the artist becomes more exploited than expressed. The biographer

is imperfectly aware of his audacity in venturing to plumb the depths of a great and often sadly disturbed spirit. He often manipulates facts to support theory. Less and less do we find his writing a fruitful comment upon the works of art by which, after all, in nine cases out of ten the genius must be expected to live after his body goes to the earth. Such considerations stand among the pros and cons of biography as an aid to literary appreciation.

I have already repeatedly emphasized the meaning of literature as an art, and the fact that it can flourish properly only when accompanied by other of the arts. We may think of the aesthetic imagination as one in essence for all the arts. A poem, for example, comes into being when a potential musician, painter, sculptor, architect and dancer finds that the literary form in some measure surpasses all others for the expression of his idea. He recites his poem musically; he sees somewhat as the painter sees; as he dreams his lines, the swaying of his body may be the germ of a dance; while his synthetic conception may have its architectural analogy. Of these analogies the poet presumably remains unconscious. They are, nevertheless, distinctly real. His reader, too, must have a potential, and preferably an actual, sympathy with all available arts. The broader the scope of his aesthetic experiences, the deeper as a rule they become. In the sum total of our literary appreciation I should regard this general aesthetic culture as a far more important factor than literary biography. Although less specific and tangible, it remains more vital and profound. It becomes a leading maxim in aesthetics that he who seeks to be proficient in one art, should be familiar with all.

The more the chief aids to aesthetic appreciation approach the full current of life, and the less pedantic and the more informal they appear, the more fruitful

they become. We are fatally disposed to trust too much in our aesthetic education to formal aids of all descriptions. While conscientious study proves barren, the desired good comes stealthily upon us. Growth cannot be strictly regulated. Appreciation develops by mere contagious infection. Clubs and lecture rooms cease to profit us. We come at length to a knowledge that a few friends who appreciate an art deeply are worth to one another more than a whole library of interpretative authors, plus a world of pedagogues. A genuine taste must always be more a product of society than of the schools. Frequently the more casual and less presuming our discussion of literature the better. A personal relation with a wise scholar brings a new warmth into all our aesthetic enjoyment. Beneath his impalpable influence we discover our zest increased and our taste refined. Still more, a personal acquaintance with good artists is the greatest aid for which any man who seeks the enjoyment of an art can wish.

The literary experience may, I believe, be as keen, enjoyable and fruitful as any in the realm which we commonly call reality. Nevertheless to weigh the literature of biography and the hints of scholars upon one hand, and a personal intimacy with a literary genius upon the other, would undoubtedly show the latter the more ponderable. Next to knowing the art-work, it is generally best to know its creator. By observation of the creative genius in actual daily life, we acquire a subtle, inexpressible sympathy with its productions. Since all persons who possess creative genius have much in common, to know one artist well, implies some knowledge of all.

The problem has still another phase. Even if we are deprived of personal intimacy with authors of unusual ability, we may acquire some knowledge of the creative

faculty by observing it in the works of less gifted persons, and even in our own writing and speech. Nevertheless the path here is not without its perils. Great poets have usually been drawn to one another's company wherever they could obtain it. Keats well observed that perhaps no roofs have harbored so many deserving of this name as the taverns of Jacobean London, those taverns of joyous names and sacred memory. Wordsworth and Coleridge, Byron and Shelley, Johnson and Burke profited deeply from friendship. On the other hand, if great minds grow even greater by association, weak minds become even weaker. If friendship has been the greatest school that art has known, it has also been even deadlier to art than the very worst academies. There are no fools like those aboard a ship of fools. Moreover, the Spirit shuns crowds. "When two or three are gathered together," wisely wrote Saint Chrysostom.

The well known legend of Keats' life rightly expresses the relative values of literary aids. We have first John Keats, whose organism and soul were destined, under certain subsequent conditions, to produce the poet. His first powerful impulse to art, we are told, came from his reading of Spenser. After the inherited virtue, the greatest furtherance to art must always be art itself. Then, the legend tells us, one day the youthful Keats met that marvel of men, Samuel Coleridge. Thenceforth his art leapt into a new power. Once more the course is as we should expect. One poet can experience no greater blessing than friendship with a poet still greater than he. In Severn, also, Keats enjoyed a true and understanding friend, a scholar and artist. These were among the chief of his blessings as a poet. That beyond these he himself had an instinctive sympathy for all the fine arts, that he both read and composed in the realm of aesthetic theory,

that he occasionally familiarized himself with constructive criticism, and was at times a scholarly reader of the text before him, may be accounted of secondary importance. He rejoiced above all else in great art, great artists, and understanding friends. This constitutes the just proportion in any aesthetic career.

In the seven disciplines for the appreciation of literature now before us, I have occasionally glanced at aspects of art suggested by the discussion in the first of these Essays. We may now take a new and more comprehensive view of the present subject by a stricter application of the definition. Thus, if art is described as a mean between the dream and the wakened consciousness, we should consider as an aid to the enjoyment of art the cultivation of those phases of dream and wakened consciousness which enter most prominently into aesthetic experience.

Broadly speaking, art implies a meeting of innocence and intellect. We must be content to resign certain of our notions of historical and logical truth; to retract as well as to advance our critical consciousness; and to relax into a passivity, from which a new enthusiasm is to arise. We must be childlike, and accept something, but not all, of the spirit of dreaming. On the other hand, we must recognize art's new logic, be prepared to grasp its subtleties, its moral and metaphysical ideas, its elaboration of form, and the rich development to which subject matter is subjected. The artist or art lover should be part child, and more than man. He will shun no unpedantic discipline for the advance of the rational faculty; and at the same time keep the vivid, fresh, innocent and resigned fancy of his youth. To become dull or to grow old—these are the two unpardonable sins, either in the poet or in the reader.

Thus far our problems in the development of taste

have been largely of so general a character as to be applicable to any literary culture. In concluding the topic, however, I wish to consider some problems specially pertinent to our modern, democratic culture and even to our system of organized education. Let us first examine the status of literary classics, and secondly the relation of aesthetic education in general to specific training in the literary field.

Modern conditions of life and thought have violently changed the significance of the classical ideal in literature. We may begin by considering in what forms this ideal has hitherto been found. Most pre-industrial communities in Europe cultivated the art of poetry in two phases: a learned or sacred literature, and a distinctly popular folk tradition. Contemporary art was largely based on one or the other of these two traditions, whose roots were in a remote past. In many lands and centuries the literature of classical Rome supplied the chief model for a secular and learned writing, while the Bible itself and the Church Fathers determined the currents of religious literature and art. At the same time a popular tradition wove countless variations upon lyrical and narrative themes. Practically every work in the art of prose or poetry could be assigned to a definite and ancient traditional form. Art was still to a great degree communal; the social still retained much of the tribal feeling for types of expression. Time moved slowly. Changes were most gradual. The modern acceleration of life, to which we have as yet scarcely accustomed ourselves, began to be felt only in the last century.

The Scotch peasant, for example, who sang his old songs, with a few revised lyrics set to the old music by Burns, and who diligently read his one serious classic, the Bible, lived in a radically different world of art and literature from our own. He was no modern Athenian,

always seeking a new thing. His eyes were continually upon the past.

In modern Europe men's eyes have been turning less and less towards the past, with its traditions that now so frequently appear outworn. New manners, new modes of thought, new views of reality and of the cosmos, have estranged men from much of the literature and art of the great Christian periods. Except for the reactionaries, only the most scholarly, imaginative and open-minded of men possess genuine sympathy for the past. A new continent has given birth to a new culture, singularly shallow in the perspective of time. Much of the older civilization, to be sure, has been transplanted to America. The older literary culture, however, has proved distinctly difficult to transplant. Those sections of the American community interested in art as practiced in Europe are, we observe, much more likely to show a lively appreciation of the modern than of the ancient European masterpieces. Contemporary European plays flood at least the New York stage, and British and even translated novels find their way in considerable numbers into the interior. Music is at present not only one of the most vigorous but, of course, the most international and classical of the arts. Händel and Bach have outstripped Dryden and Pope. Our literature tends to internationalism with modernity.

Meanwhile the schools and academies have valiantly striven to conserve for the public that which fate seems determined that the public shall no longer enjoy. Educators have frequently confessed to the apparent failure of their enterprise of bringing the American schoolboy into the company of Chaucer, Shakespere, Milton, Addison and Wordsworth. The familiar claim of the optimists of the movement has been, however, that the transplanted culture cannot be expected to flourish in

merely two or three generations. Give us time, we are told, and the spiritual treasures of Europe will be ours also. But Europe itself has at the same time been rapidly turning from its older heritage. Russia repudiates all before Karl Marx, and the countries of western Europe have grown far too self-conscious seriously to be interested in their ancestors unless it be as a psychological study in heredity. It would be a miracle indeed if a culture that ceases to be the popular heritage of Europe should renew its youth in America.

When any mind attains intellectual maturity it becomes allured by the exotic, and sympathetic with worlds from which it has hitherto been estranged. To know life deeply in any age implies some curiosity and sympathy for all ages of man. If our modern popular culture were actually deep it would also be universal in sympathy. It may earnestly be questioned, however, whether any mature intellectual culture within the near future can be at the same time democratic. In this field little of course is possible beyond speculation. My own conclusions, however, are that the literary masterpieces of past ages will for a long period to come remain seriously understood and enjoyed only by an aristocracy of scholars; and that to further a more catholic appreciation we have taken a far too simple and direct course. While the general expansion of knowledge continues to restore or actually to recover many classics, the acceleration of social evolution must render the classics themselves increasingly distant from popular view. To assist the forces that make for a more general enjoyment of these works, the educational system can do no better than to direct literary appreciation to works that may be naturally and spontaneously enjoyed by the public at large, the better specimens of modern popular writing. We should, I believe, first cultivate a literary taste, and after-

wards turn the imagination, so cultivated, towards the more superficial aspects of classical authors. Understanding and enjoyment in art can never be forced. Pushed to businesslike extremes an ultra-academic program brings on a condition of tedium and hypocrisy, student and teacher alike mumming classical works which neither enjoys or understands. Art that has long ceased to be ecstasy or pleasure is gradually transformed into a puritanical penance. Or the ironic illusion arises, whereby persons so far flatter themselves as to believe that they comprehend and enjoy that which escapes them. Adults may be so deceived, but not children. The children are merely bored.

Among the primary limitations that beset the entire modern educational outlook, we must reckon with the tradition of bookishness, inherited from the monastic phase of the Middle Ages. In that culture a single book enjoyed a position of incomparable authority, while subsidiary volumes were the staple of daily educational nurture. True, the Middle Ages as a whole produced many arts of great eminence. The orthodox tradition of the schools, however, acknowledged the sole supremacy of the book. All public education, indeed, becomes tempted to a similar attitude, since of all art forms the book is the most readily produced. Beneath a single roof the volumes that may be assembled are legion. What a convenience to derive aesthetic experience from printed or even handwritten pages, rather than from painting, music, sculpture, architecture, dancing and the other arts? Thus a library naturally becomes the heart of every institution of learning. It may well be a source of regret, however, that the library should ever occupy the tyrannical place that it so often has come to hold.

Even in the later Middle Ages the bookish tradition flourished. The Carthusians, for example, renounced as

morally evil their own marvelous decorative arts of color, falling back upon an austere architecture and a still more austere music to aid literature in their war with the Fiend. With the renaissance of secular life in the ensuing centuries, however, came a generous acceptance of all man's known modes of aesthetic experience. In the century of Michelangelo, Tasso and Spenser, European culture reached in this respect its most liberal and distinguished achievement. Yet this century also witnessed the birth of the great reaction. Protestantism from the standpoint of aesthetic history deserves the name of the Carthusian movement of modern times, as the Carthusians themselves have been called the medieval puritans. Such a figure as Samuel Johnson represents the gradual drying up of all but the literary springs of aesthetic life. In spite of his friendship for Reynolds, Johnson possessed little real sense for painting. One looks in vain in his works for acute judgments of the fine arts, comparable to those which he delivers in the domain of morality. He has apparently little sense for music or architecture, and one searches wistfully through his ponderous volumes for praise of the minuet. When one compares this great scholar with an Elizabethan, with Edmund Spenser, for example, one notes how profound had been the decline in a really liberal view of the arts. One will think in vain of any art of the sixteenth century—and surely that age was not meagre in aesthetic development—with which it is possible to conceive Spenser unsympathetic. Unhappily Doctor Johnson, not Spenser, represents the spirit of public education during the last century and a half. Our children who draw pictures in their schoolbooks are said to desecrate them; while the janitor complains that colored chalk spoils that inelegant symbol of our enlightened education, the blackboard. For this condition we have the rise of demo-

cratic and industrial institutions largely to thank. No serious student of our age can look upon the wave of literary philistinism without regret.

If this unfortunate tendency has advanced further in America than in any other land under the dominance of Western civilization, it must also be acknowledged that in quite recent years the shortcomings of the American educational system in this regard have been recognized by many leaders. Within the near future little, one presumes, will be accomplished. Yet all beginnings are frail. We may at least hope that these Quixotic leaders are in fact the first guides to a new cultural era, in which literature itself will enjoy renewed life, since as an art it must flourish all the more vigorously beside other forms of aesthetic attainment. For the arts stand when united and fall when isolated.

CHAPTER VI

PHASES OF LITERATURE

HITHERTO I have examined the place of literature among the arts, and the general relation between book and reader. In short, I have considered literature as a whole. I shall now dismiss its constant and consider its occasional meaning. Our topics will still remain highly generalized, but relate to various important aspects of the art, rather than to the art viewed entire. Reflecting the change in subject matter, the Essays that are to follow are composed in a slightly different spirit from the preceding, are briefer, and less formal in construction. Although frequently with reference to the more inclusive ideas of the earlier part of this book, these studies belong to the opposite hemisphere of the literary problem as I envisage it. They have been grouped under a single head. While each may be read independently, I have attempted to give to the whole the quality of a sequence. Throughout I have been deliberately profuse in allusions to English poetry, and to aesthetic experience even beyond the realm of language itself. All the topics are distinctly familiar in discussions of the aesthetics of literature. I have studied agreements and divergences between schools of art; examined the problem of form and content; the significance of the length of the composition; various attitudes towards time, space and motion; the suggestive and explicit; simple and ornate; surprising and expected. I have studied certain aspects of symbol-

ism in poetry; the theory of the sublime; modernity in subject matter; and lastly, in somewhat greater detail, the relation of literature to modern science. These constitute the most important topics which I am able to discern that relate to special phases of the art rather than to its essential nature.

I

FORM AND CONTENT

Two sharply divergent ideas of form are commonly found in discussions of literature. We may distinguish these attitudes of analysis by the terms medial form and aesthetic form. By medial form is meant the style and composition of a work, and indeed its whole being formally considered, by means of which the content is expressed. In this sense form is therefore conceived as a means to an end. Some objection may justly be taken to the term aesthetic form, but I can discover no more satisfactory expression for the idea. By aesthetic form is meant pure form considered as an end in itself; or, in other words, an idea of form or beauty as a joyous realization beyond any thought of the subject matter of the work. In this case subject matter becomes a means to create the idea of form. In the full appreciation of literature, however, the two experiences, that of pure form, and that of content, must be present in an approximately equal degree. In that experience as I conceive it the reader will regard form neither as a means nor as the sole end. For purposes of analysis it is no doubt well to consider form in one or the other of these two senses. Each idea correctly describes a phase of the entire problem. Form and content never actually become one, yet are to any genuine literary understanding always inseparable. This holds equally true whether we regard form as a necessary means to, or as a necessary part of, the total experience. The properly inspired reader realizes form both as a means and as an end in itself; never in his complete view of a poem neglecting either form or

content. Pure form, medial form and content, when taken together, give us the poet's full meaning.

In all true literature the content of the work depends upon the medial form. Where the form is absent the content is absent. Of course such a statement must be understood in a relative sense. If in a long work, for example, a few words are chipped off here or there, the general effect need hardly be impaired. Moreover, in the case of much prose a great part of the effect may remain even in translation. When, however, still greater liberties are taken with the form, the content quickly takes wing.

Striking examples of this observation may be found in the change which a theme undergoes when treated by two artists working in the same or different *genre*. Several of the plays of Shakespere afford us excellent illustrations. The story of King Lear is told in an earlier English play. That play only in the most superficial respects resembles Shakespere's, which we shall presumably regard as by far the finer production. A variant of the same principle may be seen in the instance of *Coriolanus*. Plutarch tells the story with great skill, but with a spirit far other than Shakespere's. The similarity between the two versions is, in the philosophical sense of the word, an accident. In accident they are alike, in substance vastly dissimilar.

We may take a final example from recent times. The story of Dostoyevski's profound novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, has been told in a French dramatic version. The dramatic dialogue closely follows the novel. Nevertheless the two works produce, if I may be permitted to speak from my own experience, the most widely divergent effects. One stirs me as a supreme work of art, while the other appears a mere confusion of elements feebly informed by art. The dramatist did perhaps as well as

could be expected. Dostoyevski's story is of a grandeur that may easily stagger rather than inspire the audacious man who seeks to cage its spirit in other forms.

In stating the strict dependence of content upon medial form, we observe that through the particular art-form alone can we know its full meaning. Criticism may imperfectly analyze it, paraphrase may imperfectly express it, but never convey its full significance. In other words, the meaning of a work of art is strictly dependent upon its own being. Without the body the soul is dead. Works of art resemble the greater works of nature, the clouds, the trees, the hills. No two specimens have quite the same value.

Aesthetic form I have defined as an abstraction quite disassociated from the content of the work as a whole. Such form is to be regarded as a shell; we admire it apart from any moral or emotional meaning which the words may contain. By this definition form becomes a mechanism, a harmony, a proportion, as abstract as any formula of stress or strain in physics. We must, to be sure, master the work in its emotional sense in order to arrive at the formal idea. But the form once perceived has largely if not indeed entirely a neutral tone. We think, not how forceful, graceful, solemn or despairing is a metre which we have before us, nor how well it expresses a context, but simply—here is perfect form! Such form can perhaps be more readily abstracted from literature than from most of the arts. The sentimental values of music prove especially hard to shuffle off. Emotion and form appear there more than in any other of the arts intimately wedded. Pure form in literature is like the pure white behind the colors of the spectrum. It seems always different and ever the same: whether we encounter it in the superb energy of Anglo-Saxon versification, in the urbane language and limpid narratives of

Chaucer, in the complicated grandeur of *King Lear*, or in the elegant trifling of *The Rape of the Lock*. Aesthetic form always appears impersonal and eternal, similar, let us say, to a curve in mathematics. The mathematician discovers a certain spiral in the movement of a star and in the unfolding of a tropical fern. His mind is upon the curve. He entirely overlooks the vulgar distinction that in one case the spiral is manifested in a heavenly body, and in another, in an undergrowth of the forest. Whoever perceives what I have termed aesthetic form in literature, entertains a similar attitude.

The view of art as pure form sharply contrasts, of course, with the view held by the sentimentalist or humanitarian, who above all else is concerned with the emotional values of the art before him. One admires the life, as the other admires the shell which the life has secreted. Now the chief paradox of the art of words lies here: that the ideal reader will always share these two views. Indeed he will rest fully contented with art only when it invites him to weigh the two factors equally. He will always deplore chaotic thought, knowing that although such thought does not preclude turbulence and vehemence, it actually impairs the most powerful emotional expression. Precisely because Dostoyevski's *The Brothers Karamazov* is a masterpiece of the greatest formal perfection, the work both expresses and supports the strain of the most terrific human passions. The rigid form makes the passions ring clear and true, makes them felt and known; while because of the element of aesthetic pleasure which an abstract view of the form affords, we are enabled to sustain a weight of passions that would otherwise crush us with their terrifying reality. From the intellectual point of view form and idea become of course one. Yet all purely aesthetic form is in its essence utterly cold and void of sentiment or logical idea. Any

literature which possesses form and form only displeases because of its frigidity. Conversely literature without distinguished form, no matter how sensational may be its subject matter, confuses us, displeases us, and defeats its own purpose.

Let us take from the English poets some illustrations of the foregoing statements. In such apocalyptic, fervid, tumultuous art as the Anglo-Saxon poem, *Crist*, for example, we feel that the poet's emotional nature has hindered him, great as his achievement is, in realizing the larger contours of form. We feel also the need for a stricter form as we survey such melodramatic work as *Titus Andronicus*, or Chatterton's *Tragedy of Ella*. We sense in Wordsworth and in Dickens a relaxation of power in both literary style and organizing genius. Form has been subordinated to a humanistic content.

John Dryden, on the contrary, would undoubtedly have been a greater poet if he had had more to say; but no one ever asked of him that he should better his sense for language. Although certain of the Elizabethans, as Dekker, were incorrigible sentimentalists, and all, as occasion demanded, could turn their hand to sentimental writing, their emotional values at times sound hollow, while their form remains as exquisite as old lacework. Passages in Shakespere, especially in his amorous verse, parts of *The Shepherd's Calendar*, much in Lyly and Greene, and some of the poems of Herrick, have, I think, a diminished value because of their too strictly formal interest. The flower has too little perfume. Such a chilly writer as Sir William Alexander, Earl of Stirling, is inevitably forgotten. The artist is hampered by the coldness of the clay in which he models.

Other of the early Scotch poets suggest problems of interest in this regard. James I was clearly overconscious of his elaborate form. He became a linguistic

virtuoso after the school of Lydgate. Sir David Lyndsay, that marvelously savoury character, cared far less for form, but was passionately devoted to his subject matter, the reformation of church and state. William Dunbar, however, one of the most remarkable men of lyrical genius whom Britain has produced, had fiery temperament enough to inspire the severe forms, academic in the work of James I, with a content as passionate as that to be found in Lyndsay. Because he descended neither to the gracious formalities of his earlier nor to the zealous informalities of his later compatriot, Dunbar has in the eyes of the world outstripped them both.

To cast light upon the eternal problems of serenity and excitement, form and sentiment, I know of no English work more curiously fascinating than the *Confessio Amantis*, by John Gower. In this poem the author attains an almost Oriental aloofness in temper and artfulness in workmanship. He narrates, however, some of the bloodiest and most terrifying stories known to mankind. Chaucer, it may be recalled, rebuked him for telling such immoral tales. Yet Gower writes a verse always smooth, artful and never really impassioned. His marvelous stories fall from him as casually as coins dropped into a pocket. He rides the storm, not sublime within the clouds, as Pindar's eagle, but high above the clouds, bathed in serene and happy light. This subtle, synthetic, unpresuming romancer of old passions must win the heart and admiration of every reader who perceives his real intention. Although superficially he appear the most naive, I am much tempted to describe him as the most civilized and mature author in our early literature. Gower achieves his effect by unassuming but faultless language and a brilliant perfection of narrative form.

Carried to their contradictory extremes, formalism of

course results in a loss of interest; and fervency in a loss of the sense for form. Each therefore may readily cause the decline and even destruction of art. As art is a mean between the dream and the awakened consciousness, so is it a mean between visionary excitement and aesthetic imagination. Art itself is lost with the loss of either element. Literature above all other of the arts invites a sentimental subject matter. The successful poet will never wholly immure himself within his form, nor abandon himself to his subject. To deny the passions and ideas is to kill his art; to give them an unbridled license within his domain, no less disastrous. As in art, so in life. To accept the storm and to be above it; to embrace the passions, and not to be their slave: this of course is the counsel of perfection. To have the fineness of the crystal and yet the warmth of life, proved as a rule beyond the capacity of Walter Pater; while William Blake failed to pass through the fires unburnt. Only the greatest artists, of whom to mention Shakespere will suffice, triumph in the reconciliation of the precision and the passion of art.

2

BREVITY AND FULLNESS

What Ben Jonson wrote of man applies of course equally to art:

It is not growing like a tree
In bulk, doth make man better be.

A lively imagination scales nature and art to the great and small at will; and, by a process akin to the mind that might be imagined in nature itself, perceives the seed in the mature creature, and the creature in the seed. To defy size lies indeed in the very essence of imagination. Here science shows its most striking kinship with art, for science discovers the principle of the solar system within the atom, and that of the atom within the sun. Although size cannot be said to be a negligible factor in art, it does not play the dominating role which one might superficially suppose.

Brevity and fullness in literature depend not so much upon what is to be expressed as upon the manner in which the author wishes to objectify his thought. A little reflection will further reveal that the most stately and opulent style may be found in brief as well as in long works. Crashaw, for example, writes in short pieces with a richness and abandon comparable to Marlowe. In his *Ode to the Nativity* Milton crowds allusion upon allusion as effectively as in *Paradise Lost*. Again, although lyrical stanzas often become monotonous in long poems, a solemnity of tone need by no means prevail in more extended works. The trivial may be enlarged and the serious diminished in scale without losing their essence or value.

It has fallaciously, I think, been held that only in a short poem can we sustain the greatest heights of ecstasy. There seems here an erroneous analogy between the aesthetic and the physical life. Some authors, like Chaucer, Spenser, Marlowe, Shakespere, Milton, Fielding and Byron, attain their greatest power only in their longer flights, while others neglect the longer and perfect only the shorter types of expression. The more extended work need not, I think, actually have lassitudes and longueurs, although a somewhat less finished workmanship it will probably show.

Let us consider first how the imagination constantly aims at simplification when applied to the more elaborate forms. Any but the most lax and presumably inferior work of art conceals within itself a simple germinal idea, an essence that might conceivably be expressed in a few words only. We discover a sentence wholly characteristic of the style of a poem, or an aphorism or phrase that sums up the philosophical idea. We have, to be sure, already observed that precisely the same thought in art can never be expressed in two forms. My contention here is, however, not only that any work, whether characterized by brevity or elaboration, admits a congruous expression in another form, but that the imagination actually strives to realize, not perhaps in form, but always in substance, this phase left concealed by the author. The power to understand is merely the power to reinterpret. We master a poem only when we become to some extent independent of the poet's actual words; when we conceive the substance of his thought existing in a realm no less real than that of words themselves; and when we feel a potential ability to grasp a similar meaning otherwise expressed. Let us take, for example, Shakespere's *King Lear*. To understand the play is to know it not only as words, but as color and as music;

to recognize the dramatist's power to synthesize his own thought, as in occasional lines given to the Fool and to Lear; to sense the texture of the style; and to conceive the germinal development of the piece from the poet's first conception of it to its ultimate state. Although we may never have read the older chronicles and ballads, or the earlier and much simpler play on the same theme, we must realize the possibility that Shakespere might himself have conveyed much of the substance of his work in these or other literary modes. Since the mature dramatic form chosen by the poet is here an elaborate one, we should naturally conceive other expressions of the idea as simpler and briefer.

Conversely we may take the instance of highly suggestive and abbreviated expression. Numerous critics have remarked that many a ballad and lyric in the later work of Thomas Hardy might easily be expanded into a novel. These poems may in some cases even represent actual plans for novels which the poet at one time considered and rejected. An appreciative reader will catch the remarkably suggestive power of the verses, and find his own imagination stirred to create a dim pageantry of figures moved on life's ironical courses.

Every long masterpiecé is, then, the expansion of a germinal idea, and every short masterpiece a focal point for rays whose ultimate limits are in large part hidden from view. To change the metaphor, the drama is the luxuriant flower, the lyric, its tightly compressed bud.

Size, however, is not without its more positive meaning for literature. Let us examine first the domain of poetry. In English verse size appears to have been an important factor in the production of four chief modes of writing. It will scarcely pay us in these distinctions to insist upon rigid categorical lines of which the poets themselves have generally been unaware. Nevertheless

the four tendencies without grave violence to the definite intention of the authors may I think be recognized. First and briefest, we have the strictly literary poem, where each word, after the model of Latin poetry, seems a distinct feature in a perfectly chiselled medallion. Second, and as a rule of slightly greater length, the lyric written in stanzaic form with the thought of an actual musical setting; a relatively brief, strictly unified, and usually sentimental composition. As the third and longer form I refer to the distinctly literary, formal and rhetorical Ode, which aims at an impression of magnitude far surpassing its actual proportions. Lastly, of course, we have the long poem, narrative, philosophical, episodic, or indeed all these combined. In this type the atmosphere of suggestion is generally less intense, and magnitude even in a physical sense actually achieved. Let us examine specimens of these four types.

The French have carried the first type to a higher perfection than the English, while the genius of Goethe at times brought it to an almost Oriental sensitivity and exactness. Its apotheosis lies of course in the Greek Anthology. As the briefest of the forms of poetry, this may in some respects boast also of being the most perfect. In such narrow limits, although a genuinely philosophical and aphoristic style is by no means impossible, as shown in the verses of Angelus Silesius, ideas generally become to a marked degree conventional. The extreme economy of the form adapts it to actual inscription. The Epitaphs of Pope and the Inscriptions, somewhat overpraised, I think, of Akenside represent this usage. The Sonnet as conceived by the great Italians, although distinctly gothic in its laborious symmetry, exhibits a feeling for brevity, perfection and essentially non-lyrical composition. Shakespere and other English sonneteers, as it appears to me, corrupt the genius of the

form with an alloy of lyrical feeling. In our literature the heights of the verse epigram were reached in a very few of the severer pieces of Collins and Cowper. Ben Jonson in his *Epigrams* discovered how far short of his classical models the English poet is likely to come. The rough but powerful genius of our language denies us supreme triumphs in this domain.

The Song, however, is native to all peoples, and has reached no greater heights than among the English. Although it may be as brief as a madrigal of a few lines only, it admits a more extended development, at times reaching in the ballad to well over a hundred lines. In this species of poetry we have learned to expect a slightly naive stanzaic form, an unpretentious language, and a purity in the emotional tone, which is further dissolved into the wine of music. In essentially lyrical feeling one may doubt if English literature has produced anything finer than the sacred and secular lyric poetry of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. What spontaneity, what purity, what charm, what clear emotional depths are there! These lyrics issued as perennial springs from the soul of the people. The lyrical expression was the voice of the commune. It would be pedantry to insist on the distinction between the narrative song and the lyric of pure mood. All this poetry, whether priestly or vulgar in origin, was written in the spirit of song, and in essentially one tradition, precious beyond description. The mantle of the medieval singers fell upon the Elizabethans, who embroidered it, perhaps, too profusely, robbed it of its deeper hues, and reduced its more flowing lines. I am disposed to regard Suckling as the most admirable song writer of the seventeenth century. An over-literary tradition had, however, already begun to detract from the charm of the effect. From literary fetters Burns redeemed this poetry in the eighteenth cen-

tury; but the genius of lyrical verse has steadily declined in proportion as it has lost touch with its sister art. William Collins aspired to "retrieve the just designs of Greece." O that some magic would also grant us to retrieve the true lyrical purity of medieval song! The musical spirit of the old singers still stirs us as we read, but in this domain the poets of a later age are either by far inferior or dumb.

Longer as a rule than either the epigrammatic poem or the song, but still in the category of short poems, may be considered the Ode. A few poems commonly described as Odes would ill fit our present description, while many more not generally so designated sufficiently accord with it. The type of poem which I intend has been written by Spenser, Jonson, Milton, Dryden, Keats, Swinburne and Francis Thompson. In short, we are dealing with a well-established tradition in English poetry. Even Whitman may be thought to have caught its finer spirit in the best of his chants. This type of poem gives, as I have said, an impression of considerable magnitude. Less subtle and suggestive than the more delicate song or epigram, it employs words with something of a rhetorical sense, with abandon and magnificence. It easily becomes a learned poetry, profuse in allusions. Of all English Odes I know of none which so well represents the tradition as Milton's *Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, its stanzaic regularity notwithstanding. In that composition we feel the force of the statement that magnitude is not size. The poem is vast without great length, and eloquent without apparent labor. It is clearly too complex to suggest the aid of music. It becomes itself the other harmony of words.

If the epigram is in poetry our standard of perfection, the long poem is our standard of power. Especially in the longer English poems one notes, I think, a falling

off in what eighteenth century critics designate as "correctness." Marlowe, Chapman, Spenser, Shakespere and even Milton scarcely attain in their major works the smoother purity of Virgil, nor does Virgil himself quite sustain the perfection of the Anthology. Chaucer, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, and Byron, in *Don Juan*, express the typical *verve* and *brio* of sustained but not faultless poetical inspiration. Their vast designs forbid them to become over-scrupulous. They ride all difficulties with majestic ease, lifting their words upon the flood tide of their enthusiasm.

In prose much the same conditions prevail. The letter, the brief essay, and the shorter story are as a rule the more suggestive and less rhetorical types, while longer works become more explicit and profuse in detail. Here then we might also discuss types of art in relation to the length of composition. The cardinal principle however remains, that size in art is fundamentally illusion. The briefer composition reveals to us in a moment of illumination a whole world lying beneath our feet; while in the longer work the author takes us by the hand and leads us through the vales and over the shoulders of the hills. So in the *Dies Irae* we see in an abrupt blaze of vision the universe from above the clouds, while in his greatest work Dante patiently conducts the reader step by step on the long road through Heaven, Purgatory and Hell.

The essence of this idea I shall discuss further while considering the roles which simplicity and suggestion play in the art of poetry.

3

DEPTH, MOTION, AND REPOSE

Time and space, motion and repose, are four of the chief elements of which art is compounded. The character of a poet's work largely depends upon his method of dealing with these factors. As his imagination expands or contracts in time and space, rushes with impetuous motion upon a half-blinded course, or comes to a comparative rest, we perceive what manner of art he produces. Some extension, some movement, some repose, all his work must possess.

The tendency to expansion in time and space we may call depth, and the tendency to contraction, shallowness. The latter word must of course be used here in a strictly descriptive sense, without the moral connotation often ascribed to it. We may say in general that depth of perspective in space and time and violent motion typify art commonly called romantic, while shallowness in such perspective and relative repose tend to characterize so-called classical expression. Since the problems now before us are among the most inclusive in the whole domain of aesthetics, it may repay us to preface our discussion of literature itself with brief observations of the fine arts.

An examination of music reveals how fundamental these factors are. Music cannot of course express time, space and motion in the manner in which literature conceives them. Nevertheless distinctly congruous effects are attained. The basis of this power in music lies in a common relationship between the four factors themselves. A single idea will, indeed, embrace them all. Depth and acute motion depend primarily upon contrast, shallowness and repose upon a lack of such contrast. In the instance

of space this is immediately clear. As we look forward towards the horizon, aerial perspective softens the distance and sharpens the foreground. The eye perceives space only through the sense for contrast. Motion, as the word is here used, also depends upon contrast. A strictly continuous motion may result either in repose or in positive monotony. A total absence of motion implies, indeed, a mere cessation and death. By motion in art is more properly meant the play of motion, from swift to slow, and from broken to regular beats. Translated into terms of time, therefore, it signifies elasticity in rhythm, while relative continuity in the rhythmical pattern signifies repose. Thus classical music suggests a formal, and romantic music, a free mode of dancing. In terms of time classical music represents a present, while romantic music suggests also a remote future and past. Seen in terms of space, classical music suggests the here, where the romantic composer suggests remote distances. Such suggestions are dependent chiefly upon the emotional tone, the classical music suggesting a more even temper, while the romantic passes through a great range of sentiment and idea. By an easy process of the imagination we transfer emotional values into values of movement, space and time. The stronger the contrasts, the more vigorous will be the movement and the greater the depth of perspective imagined. Thus, a serene passage followed by quiet but ominous music, may suggest a landscape that lies in sunshine at our feet, while distant hills are shrouded in rapidly advancing clouds. So in music as well as in other arts these primary physical values are pertinent.

In architecture and sculpture ideas of space and motion are, of course, better expressed than those of time. Here, however, the chief features of our distinction are abundantly clear. Classical architecture depends for its effects

upon a self-contained form, and avoids the romantic effects of angular vistas. Where it evokes the feeling of immensity it gives to the spectator a sense that he is himself within the center of this immensity. He stands beneath a dome, all the lines of which flow in circles, and center in repose. Everything appears to him vast, but nothing remote. Contrast has so far as possible been restrained. Decoration is employed to enrich the surfaces, not, as in gothic art, to stress structural lines that lead the eye to the most remote perpendicular and longitudinal parts of the structure. Motion and repose have also long been regarded as two of the chief criteria in distinguishing the types and schools of sculpture.

If painting, so far as pure form is concerned, is slightly inferior to sculpture in the expression of repose, if not of motion, its power over color gives it new potentialities, since some colors are in themselves alarming and others restful. Moreover in conveying the idea of remoteness sculpture is far outstripped by painting. Sculpture affords more refinement in the expression of spatial depth than painting, but cannot so well convey impressions of far distance. The sculptor's perspective is limited by his medium. The painter, however, has at his disposal our best medium to convey the naturalistic idea of remoteness.

Painters themselves have held this power in various esteem. Decoration tends, of course, to eliminate perspective or reduce it to a minimum. Only the landscape painter has proved *par excellence* the master of the effect of remoteness. And even among such painters one notes a great distinction in the degree to which remoteness proves alluring. Most European artists, for example, place the point of vision close to the surface of the earth, and work on largely naturalistic lines. The Oriental painter, on the contrary, imagines himself as a

rule elevated far above the ground. He takes a bird's-eye view of his landscape, as if sitting in an aeroplane. Indeed many of his more spacious compositions give an impression of compromise with map-making. A whole province lies stretched before us, on which tiny figures, again and again repeated, enact the scenes of a romance. As the owner unrolls his scroll before us, we travel in the mind's eye from lofty mountains to a distant sea. Or, in a scroll that unrolls or hangs horizontally, we trace a stream from its source in snow-capped mountains, down, down in dashing cataract and leaping fall, through woods and lakes, past temples, villages and towns, till it merges at length with the same ocean. A great majority of even the smallest Oriental landscape paintings have in them a feeling for aerial perspective. The eye looks down upon the earth, and out rather than upward to the stars. Individual forms, though keenly drawn, are usually much diminished by perspective. Man appears as a mere atom in nature. If a cliff impends above us, it hangs from a far height; if a mountain looms in the distance, we see it as one in a vast range. The idea of time in painting must of course be suggested rather than explicitly declared; but how skillfully it may be conveyed the art of Rembrandt and Titian attest.

Literature enjoys great power in expressing all the elements that we have considered. The distant and the remote, the past, present and future, as well as motion and repose, may be effectively conveyed through its medium. Let us first consider romantic expression of space, time and motion. Among modern authors few have been so successful as Thomas Hardy in this technique. Depth of space he has so remarkably achieved in a recent poem, *The Sheep Boy*, that I am induced to give the piece in full. The significant words, "On Rainbarrows," have been appended to it. It might almost as

readily, however, have been a meditation upon a water color by Turner.

A yawning, sunned concave
Of purple, spread as an ocean wave
Entroughed on a morning of swell and sway
After a night when wind-fiends have been heard to rave:
Thus was the Heath called "Draäts," on an August day.

Suddenly there intunes a hum:
This side, that side, it seems to come.
From the purple in myriads rise the bees
With consternation mid their rapt employ.
So headstrongly each speeds him past, and flees,
As to strike the face of the shepherd-boy.
Awhile he waits, and wonders what they mean;
Till none is left upon the shaggy demesne.

To learn what ails, the sheep-boy looks around;
Behind him, out of the sea in swirls
Flexuous and solid, clammy vapour-curls
Are rolling over Pokeswell Hills to the inland ground.
Into the heath they sail,
And travel up the vale
Like the moving pillar of cloud raised by the Israelite:—
In a trice the lonely sheep-boy seen so late ago,
Draäts' Hollow in gorgeous blow,
And Kite-Hill's regal glow,
Are viewless—folded into those creeping scrolls of white.

Small commentary is here needed upon so clear and masterful a work of art. The tiny figure of the child is drowned in the vast concavities of nature, amid gorgeous color, and solemn and surprising movement. Like the child, the poet and reader become lost in the immensities of space.

We have seen that of all the arts literature most readily conveys the idea of time. True, a naturalism, which tends to identify literature as an art with history, or a sentimentalism, which turns literature into egotistical reverie upon things past, and to come, destroy the better

genius of the art of words. Thus all historians must expect that their works shall lose in worth when viewed as art only. They have insufficiently expressed certain of those qualities which art has in common with the dream. Again, such a reminiscent, lacrimose sentimentalist as the Dorset poet William Barnes (a writer however of considerable merit) sacrifices art to memory. On the other hand a sense for perspectives in time, whether extending into the far past or future, at once appeals to us as poetic. Such sciences as physics, geology, paleontology and anthropology are therefore in essence among the most poetical forms of knowledge. The romantic imagination, in love with movement, leaps upon all notions of development and evolution. The supreme mysteries of life are the stories of the growth of the individual before and after birth, and the rise and decline of families, of states and of the human race itself. The poetry of religion and metaphysics takes us beyond all vulgar conceptions of space and time, and declares the primal splendor: "As when of old the stars of morning sung." For these sublime vistas we must go to the springs of romantic poetry.

Without a sense for movement we should scarcely be impelled to reach for far distances in space and time. In literature as in painting, motion has been expressed with varying success. Keats, for example, has far less desire or ability to convey motion than Shelley. The poetry of the latter so abounds in virtually mad and intoxicated images of motion as to resemble more often the violence of dreams than the firmness of an ideal art. Swinburne inherited from him a similar passion. To my own taste the finest effects of motion in English poetry occur in the work of Coleridge; although William Collins has a most surprising passage on geological change in his *Ode to Liberty*. Spenser's imagery often moves with

dream-like yet artful swiftness, as does that of George Meredith. Motion in Milton seems more epical and august. A most extraordinary feeling for movement in both time and space may be experienced in Thomas Hardy's *The Dynasts*. Time moves now swiftly, now slowly, while space rushes past us in vast curves, or stands for a moment arrested, enabling us to make detailed and intimate inspections. The theatre must of course always have more of the statuesque than we experience in sheer poetry. Of this principle the three dramatic unities of Aristotelian criticism are an expression. *The Dynasts* fails completely upon the modern stage because we have developed no theatrical technique remotely capable of dealing with its conceptions of space, time and motion. The starry heavens are its stage, lit by the flickering of the aurora, and curtained by rushing clouds.

In the instance of Shelley we have had warning that an ultra-romantic feeling for motion in time and space may actually prove an obstruction to the art of poetry. Less violent and extreme effects may readily be the more pleasing. Consider, for example, the sense for movement in such work as *The Way of the World* or *The Alchemist*. These plays show only the most reticent conceptions of space and time. The characters in the plays issue from nowhere and vanish into nothing, without participating in a past or future. In this regard they are intentionally portrayed such that we shall view their existence as purely theatrical. The scene too is deliberately confined to a few rooms. Here are no romantic perspectives, and no rush and terror of wings. Life is depicted in its familiar modes of common conversation. Jane Austen could be no more reticent in this regard. Yet some degree of motion all art demands if it is itself to live. Both Congreve's play and Jonson's have a subdued movement not incomparable to the sense of the

reposeful line as exemplified in the idealistic age of classical sculpture. The action rises and falls, and presents a few surprising scenes; the dialogue always sparkles; the play moves smoothly and delightfully, never offending us with startling or incongruous effects. Although nothing is fantastic, nothing is banal. An austere controlled social humor finds in such a work its inevitable expression. *The Way of the World* may as easily be preferred to such melodrama as Chapman's admirable *Bussy D'Ambois*, as an early and severe Greek grave monument may in a certain mood be more appealing than melodrama such as the Laocoon. Whether that cosmic melodrama, *The Dynasts*, be actually a better work of art than *The Alchemist*, is, I take it, too large a problem for any man to determine. Considered as biology the question resolves itself to which of two organs will win the victory, man's fantastic brain, or his metronomic heart. Meanwhile we may safely observe that no successful classical art can be wholly without some sense for motion, however reticent this may be; and no successful romantic art wholly without some ultimate sense for reposeful form. An art-work may be said to come to completion only as its enveloping form produces a reposeful effect. This is the aesthetic principle violated in so many of Shelley's less successful compositions.

4

SUGGESTION, SIMPLICITY AND SURPRISE

Close upon the contrast between romantic and classical attitudes towards motion, time and space follow numerous further contrasts in aesthetic style. Romantic artists, for example, develop a more suggestive manner than the classicists, and go at the same time to far greater extremes in simplicity and surprise. The classicist in other words is the more explicit artist; never alarming us, perplexing us, nor, on the contrary, courting us with insipidity. Let us examine these problems in turn, first directing our thought to the topic of suggestion.

From our study of the classical attitude towards time, space and motion we have seen the essence of the classical spirit to lie in restraint. The poet of this tradition rejects the broader and often metaphysical speculations of the romanticist, confining himself to a highly limited conception of space and time, and to a reserved expression of movement. Moreover, since he chooses as a rule to lay his scene in a world close to the society in which he lives, he writes with particular moral effectiveness. Romantic or mystical detachment is foreign to his nature. He remains in the practical world. Now simplification becomes essential in any practical enterprise. Clear, explicit language alone will serve the desired end. The imagination of such a poet as Ben Jonson, for example, is characterized by extreme definiteness and specificity. Thus his characters are well aware of the time of day. They listen for the bells of Paul's, and go to work or to pleasure as the hour commands. Their spatial world is also clearly, even coldly delimited. Objects in a room are seen as we see them in a realistic Dutch interior. No

fog or shadow, no romantic, Rembrandtesque chiaroscuro, conceals a single feature from view. We look into faces as mercilessly revealed as those by Holbein and by Dürer. One aspect of life, the practical, everywhere and always confronts us.

The classical mind shuns all audacity in symbolism. While the Chinese artist suggests a bush by a petal, and a forest by a limb, the European realist meticulously counts the leaves and the trees. Ben Jonson, true scholar that he is, wishes to say all that may be said upon his subject; to leave all facts unmistakably expressed, so that the reader has no need to indulge in any surmises of his own.

The romantic poet, on the contrary, is never scrupulous for the exact. He conceives his reader as a partner and not a subject, as a true collaborator, not a passive mind ready to be stamped with precise impressions. The explanation of his position lies in the fact that he deals with a subject matter incapable of exact expression. He concerns himself more largely with emotional effects, and less with minute observations. Wherever he assumes the role of moralist, he appeals to man's heart and to his more abstract conceptions. He sings of ideals: the classicist writes of what he deems facts. Life, however, judges the dispute impartially, ironically finding much futility and illusion in our practical notions of reality, and much that is practical in our more intuitive and illusive apprehensions.

The classical artist appears to best advantage in the differentiations of local and contemporary manners and forms; the romanticist, in the expression of the elementary passions and experiences enjoyed in common by mankind. While a poet such as George Crabbe botanizes, revealing some hitherto unobserved contour in a particular species of leaf or fern, another poet such as Coleridge

by the magic of suggestion summons up for us the most thrilling and profound of our actual experiences when walking on a forest floor. One lingers over the precise curves of a wave; the other by delicate suggestion conveys to us through sharp imagery a blended memory of our life by the sea. One paints body, the other soul. The classical manner, pressed to an extreme, leads to scientific observation and mathematical accuracy; the romantic manner, similarly extended, leads to silence and to the ineffable. One tends to rob art of its essential affinity with dreams, the other, of its necessary affinity with the wakened consciousness. One at worst becomes banal, obtrusive and harsh; the other, indefinite, impalpable and ineffectual.

The organic nature of art can nowhere be more remarkably observed than in the similarity in this domain between a single line or phrase and the entire art-work in which the part lies imbedded. One frequently finds that an entire poem can with no more certainty be described as inclined towards the suggestive or the explicit phase of art than its least fragment. Some poets, to be sure, like Milton, are to a considerable degree synthetic. Crabbe, however, is overwhelmingly a poet of specificity, as Coleridge is overwhelmingly a poet of suggestion.

If art is to incline in one or the other of these directions, we should, I think, prefer that it should tend towards the more suggestive manner, for this seems art's peculiar province as distinguished from science, history and philosophy. Our greatest literary age is on the whole the age of the most rapid and suggestive style. Marlowe, in his *Doctor Faustus*, Chapman, Dekker, Peele, Greene and their associates crowd, I believe, more meaning into briefer space than any group of English poets. In other words, they work free from banality and obvi-

ousness. Shakespere excels them all in power to suggest much in a few strokes. In this regard his genius in comedy appears by no means inferior to his genius in tragedy. For intense power to convey more than is literally said, the scenes depicting Dame Quickly and Justice Shallow equal those depicting Lear and Macbeth. In avoiding every suggestion of haste, and yet achieving the maximum of aesthetic economy, few works of art rival *The Tempest*.

We instinctively feel that language to be the best which says the most with greatest brevity. For my final illustration I shall descend to conversation. One day in early spring I walked silently along a country road with a friend from the Orient. He had gathered along the wayside, after the frugal custom of his country, a few wild onions, which he intended to use in preparing the evening meal. Down the road before us came a small girl carrying a bouquet of frail wild flowers in her hand. After the girl had passed, I jocosely remarked that at each step her flowers were decaying, while his onions were nearing their humanly appointed goal. My companion, after the manner of his race, more succinctly and significantly remarked: "they are becoming dust, and these spirit." To the poetic mind the valleys lie in mist, while the mountain peaks alone soar into the clear air.

The same sense of reserve which deters the classical poet from bold excursions of the imagination into realms of emotion, of time and of space, deters him also from the two contradictory extremes of perplexed and insipid expression. The romantic poet, on the other hand, is fascinated with intricacy, which to the classicist seems confusion, and allured by simplicity, which to the classicist seems childish. The qualities of contrast and surprise appear in romantic art in a profusion highly dis-

tasteful to the unsympathetic. These qualities were precisely the butts of the ridicule which in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* Beaumont, the follower of Ben Jonson, levelled against the romantic and popular hack writers of the day. Elizabethan profusion passed away as the abundant fancy of that age was lost. But the poor we have with us always. Consequently the eighteenth-century critics continued to wage war against what to them appeared the insipid in art. The directness and simplicity of the popular songs and ballads, now so much admired, failed to engage the taste of the judicious of the age. From Ben Jonson to Samuel Johnson critics and poets raised a continuous cry against the supposed shallowness of a highly simplified art.

The actual status of simplicity well merits our attention. Every work of art, when thoroughly understood, should appear simple. Even the *Divine Comedy* must have seemed such to its author. The Scholastics defined God as a simple essence. All God's works were considered to lie like a primer before him. Nothing could appear simpler than the universe to its Creator. The analogy for art holds completely. If we are even so much as conscious of strained effort in the interpretation of a composition, we have failed to master it. No matter how gracious, spontaneous or inspired parts of a work may seem, if the whole fails to reveal itself as a simple essence we may be critically fascinated, but not delighted and entranced. Collins has exquisitely expressed this thought in a profound stanza:

Though taste, though genius bless
To some divine excess,
Faints the cold work till thou inspire the whole;
What each, what all supply
May court, may charm the eye;
Thou, only thou, canst raise the meeting soul.

Simplicity in this sense all great art must, no doubt, possess. Overelaborateness has been feared at all times, although each artist places his line at a somewhat different point. Marlowe, for example, certainly had stricter notions of coherence than John Fletcher. Shakespere, following the trend of his times, composed his most complex works towards the end of his career. Modern critics generally regard his later elaborateness in language and situation as a fault. Thus *Othello* has been far more praised than *Cymbeline* or *A Winter's Tale*. That the great dramatist in *The Tempest* (which may possibly have been the last of his works), returned to a far simpler plot and a somewhat simpler style, has been a source of much gratification to his more eulogistic biographers. It has somewhat boldly been assumed that any tradition in art begins crudely, reaches a moment of classical perfection and simplicity, where strength is at last wedded to refinement, and so declines along the path of false elaboration.

"How vast and impassable is the gulf between simplicity and insipidity," wrote William Blake, whose words may serve as introduction to our final discussion of this insoluble problem. Once more we all concur as to the reasonableness of the words, but no two persons quite agree as to where the line which Blake mentions should be drawn. To my own taste, for example, one of the most sublime instances of the naive in art is the transition between the music of the storm and the so-called hymn of praise in Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony. Yet a few critics have ventured to find this moment lacking in artistic subtlety. What to my simple ear is purely delightful, to them seems flat.

All successful art must, I think, give the sense of a difficulty overcome. Truly aesthetic form is always difficult form. On the other hand the reader of a poem

must beware that the poet has not actually so far concealed his skill that it fails of recognition. Much loveliness is of so perfectly inobtrusive a nature as to pass unnoticed. To overlook a demure beauty constitutes, indeed, one of the sorriest insults that may be paid to art. A Brahms Song may actually have more merit than a Liszt Rhapsody, and a popular ballad or a seeming trifle by Matthew Prior, more beauty than a History of the World written by a sophisticated wit. Splendor and splurge, simplicity and insipidity, truth and falsehood, bear to the casual eye much the same countenance. There is here no other rule than vigilance.

A distinction, however, has been made between simplicity, which is to some extent the requisite of all art, and that extreme form of simplicity, naïveté. Where the power of presentation greatly exceeds that of apparent criticism, we have the latter effect, of which Chaucer's *Prologue* stands in English poetry as a supreme specimen. Chaucer's art, although never obvious, is as unbiased as a perfect mirror; as amazingly frank as the words of a child, who unwittingly tells the truth regarding some social embarrassment; as direct as the flight of a bee; as aromatic and refreshing as an armful of meadow flowers. Although his words convince us instantaneously, the style is actually a much rarer attainment than a highly ornate manner, such as that of Francis Thompson. It is really no less subtle than direct. Chaucer's naive style, to conclude, embodies a special phase of simplicity: it cannot be said to represent simplicity as a general factor in art. For many of the ideas with which art deals are by nature intricate, and may be said to be simply conceived only in the sense that they are conceived cleanly, with a maximum of economy. Art is everywhere intolerant of the superfluous.

Behind all notions of depth and movement in art we

have observed the element of contrast. From accentuated contrast springs in turn the effect of surprise, which is everywhere the sparkle and the life of art. Any work so bare as to lack this factor lacks a capacity to give true aesthetic pleasure. By felicitous surprise novelty is presented, difficulties are overcome, and apparently discordant elements in the end harmonized. The classical author again shows his reticence in a wholesome fear that in the quest of this quality the poet may fall into eccentricity. He becomes a student of delicacy, as the romanticist of boldness.

Surprise constitutes one of the most democratic features of art. All desire it. The child who listens to a story of wonder, the youth who reads a tale of mystery, the most fastidious stylist who seeks novelty in form, and the serious thinker who travels in quest of new ideas find that art interprets both itself and life as adventure. One quality all persons demand of literature: that it shall be entertaining, and not dull. More dream-like and primitive an element than aesthetic form itself, surprise still remains a factor in its most advanced stages.

Of surprise we may distinguish two types: the simple and the complex. Here the history of architecture affords valuable analogies. Professor Prior has well observed that the French Gothic of the finest period expresses chiefly *abandon*. With amazing simplicity its major lines rise from the floor to the groining of the roof. A more elemental, a more astonishing design than the nave of Amiens, architecture has never produced. It may be regretted that Professor Prior, at this juncture becoming the archaeologist, neglected to press the contrast between this and the second type of surprise exhibited so remarkably in Early English architecture, notably at Lincoln. Here all elements are distinguished; moldings accentuated; details varied; grotesques multi-

plied; and contrasts of light and shade, mass, line and texture, carried almost to fantastic extremes. Amiens exhibits surprise in simplicity, Lincoln surprise in complexity.

What is so strikingly exhibited in the two chief schools of gothic architecture appears, of course, with equal clarity in literature. A perfect and naive lyric is as breathtaking as the nave of Amiens, while the brilliantly variegated action of any of the great Mystery Cycles, as the *Ludus Coventriae*, surprises us in the manner of Lincoln. Even the latter works have, of course, their ultimate simplicity, integrity and architectonic form. Neither the English cathedral nor the English Mystery Play, at least from the English medieval point of view, suffers from eccentric and disintegrating forces.

The history of the element of surprise in English poetry leads us to two chief observations: that English poets have indulged the tendency profusely, and that only in the eighteenth century does it suffer a serious decline. The chief English dramatists cultivated the unexpected to a most marked degree. Even when following classical models, as Shakespere in *The Comedy of Errors*, and Jonson in *The Alchemist*, the modern plays exhibit many more unexpected scenes than the old. English poets have been as bold in inventing novelties in detail as actual types of composition. Much may be said in support of the familiar opinion that they have been more striking in their effects and less bound to convention than any of their continental rivals.

Even in the mid-eighteenth century the English genius turned to the grotesque. The suave art of Reynolds and Gainsborough was accompanied by the amazing art of Hogarth. For seven centuries England has produced masters of the grotesque manner in literature. A host of names rises before us: Chaucer, Skelton, Shakespere,

Butler, Smollett, Dickens and Thomas Hardy occupy the foremost rank in this glorious march of unconventionality. As literary history continues to unfold, we shall, I think, increasingly regard the movement of Pope as an episode only. The smooth couplet, the reticent imagery, the prescribed subject and design, which typify the art of Pope's followers, failed to capture the entire imagination of his own age; and we look in vain before or after for analogies in our literature. Moreover for grotesque imagery the Second Book of the *Dunciad* itself is as good as anything in *Piers Plowman*. Ours is not the art of decorum.

Because of the cumbrous nature of the subject viewed as a whole, I am induced to select as a special field for comment the story of rhythm in English verse. A persistent love of surprising and irregular effects at once appears. Coleridge, to be sure, in commenting upon *Cristabel* stated that he had introduced a new principle into English versification, namely, that rhythm should not depend upon a strict number of the syllables. The great poet and critic must for the moment have forgotten that for five centuries of English poetry this principle had been observed without exception, and that it had actually flourished for nine centuries, that is, until the extinction of alliterative verse. The enthusiast to-day who should prefer Pope's "corrections" of Donne's Satires to the originals would be rare indeed. English blank verse in the hands of Shakespeare, Fletcher, Jonson and Milton discloses the most extreme irregularities. The inability of the early nineteenth-century poets, in all but their happiest moments, to free themselves completely from the eighteenth-century ideal of smoothness renders their versification in general amorphous and unpleasing; it enjoys neither the superb distinction of Pope nor the admirable ruggedness of the Elizabethans. The later

writers of the nineteenth century, realizing the weakness inherent in the Tennysonian manner, boldly stepped forth upon new ways. So far as the strictly modern poets have an ancestry in English, it must be traced in the seventeenth rather than in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Moreover in our feeling for surprise we are far closer than our fathers to the aesthetic temper of the Middle Ages.

The enormous vogue of stanzaic forms gave to the greater part of the poetry of the later Middle Ages a distinctly lyrical effect. In so far as this poetry remained stanzaic, it preserved a strong conventionalizing factor. Nevertheless within the line itself such freedom was attained that nineteenth century editors pronounced Lydgate unreadable because of his roughness (if from no other cause); and described the verse of the *Ludus Coventriae* as doggerel. To my own taste, however, Lydgate's versification seems generally pleasing, and the free, naive, vigorous rhythms of the Mystery Play appear thrillingly beautiful. We have of late acquired a sharper ear for the intricacies of nursery rhymes. These should throw much light on the verse of the Mystery Play. In passing it may be remarked that irregularities in this verse seem far more significant than irregularities in the popular ballads. The explanation I believe to be simple. The dramatic verse was generally written to be spoken, and the ballad verse always composed to be sung.

A freedom of rhythmical play within the line the Elizabethans inherited from the Middle Ages. It remained, however, for the seventeenth century to break away from the simpler lyrical stanzas, and to create a genuinely literary short poem comprising lines of irregular length. The free Pindarics, so called, were, to be sure, as a rule inferior to stanzaic pieces. But in the stanzaic poems themselves the line scheme was broken

into the most surprising patterns. To realize the revolution in taste we need only turn the pages of such a representative sixteenth-century poet as Turberville, and the pages of the two Herberts, Donne, Vaughan, Traherne, Joseph Beaumont, Cartwright, Herrick and the host of wits who flourished in the Jacobean and Caroline periods. These poets of the early seventeenth century delighted in the refinements of rhythmical surprise.

To appreciate the significance of the seventeenth century manner for contemporary verse style, the reader of this book may turn back to my citation of the recent poem entitled "The Sheep Boy," by Hardy. Mr. Hardy has of late become an indefatigable student of irregularities in length and in rhythm whereby the line may better express its idea. As a Victorian, he wrote graceful sonnets, ballads, and highly conventional lyrics. With the turn of the century his own style changed. Each successive volume has shown him more devoted to the element of surprise in rhythmical and imagistic effect. In his most recent collection we read poems on the metaphysical notions of Einstein deliberately composed in the abrupt rhythmical patterns of the English seventeenth-century "metaphysical poets." Even *The Sheep Boy*, as we have seen, has his metaphysical significance. For the present, however, we are concerned only secondarily with its content. It will at once be observed that the poet has varied the length of his lines at will, and freely molded each rhythmical element to express the immediate turn of the thought. If his little poem lacks the lyrical simplicity which we observed in the vast nave of Amiens, it retains something of the intricate poetic charm that we have discerned in the Early English art of the smaller church at Lincoln. Upon a study of English architecture Mr. Hardy first nourished his aesthetic sensibilities; and now, seventy years later, he composes verse in the man-

ner of the noble art which in his early rambles he found in the village churches and manor houses of old Dorset. For he remains close not only to the soil but to the heart of England.

5

SYMBOLISM AND ITS MANY FRIENDS

In countless ways symbolism permeates the world of art and literature. In discussing the subject with comparative brevity, my defense must be that in essence it remains as inexhaustible as life itself. However extensive the argument might become, it could embrace only a part of its theme. We may therefore the more readily content ourselves with a fragment.

The prevalence and prominence of symbolism in art might be cited as further justification of our view of art as an offspring of dreams. All literature betrays some evidence of symbolical thinking, and that literature in which symbols flourish most luxuriantly in this as well as in other of its qualities approximates most nearly the dream state. I can think of no great English poem more dream-like than Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. No one doubts its symbolical nature. Moreover, as in the interpretation of actual dreams, the doctors disagree as to what the images mean.

Symbolism, we are all aware, is the language of intuition and emotion. Once more we perceive its kinship with both dreams and art. By a felicitous symbol the thinker leaps a gap which logic alone would not enable him to cross; and by a happy image the poet gives expression to emotion that seemed ineffable. Religion, which is everywhere visionary, creates ritual, which is grounded in symbolism. Thus the symbol unites flesh and spirit, body and idea. The art of language most intimately allies itself to its sister arts as it brings to the mind's eye of the reader physical images of striking color, texture and form. The more vivid the imagination becomes, the more it is lured into the domain of symbolism.

In the preceding Essay we observed that some schools of poetry employ words with more suggestive and less explicit meanings than other schools. All artists in language actually use words in a more suggestive manner than is common in daily conversation. We may truthfully say that the words of the poet tend to richer, more complex and more elusive meanings than the same words as used in common speech. Although powerful and unmistakable in their essential import, the poet's words create also an atmosphere. They not only dart, but glow. An unfigurative language rarely glows. This power and richness, which the artist purchases at the expense of logical or scientific definition, can often best be won by imagery. A figurative name may not be so precise as its corresponding literal name, but it will presumably be more imaginative. If I wish to endorse a check to Mr. Charles Brown, I must designate him simply, "Charles Brown." But if I wish to express my feeling for him, I may invest him in any number of figurative expressions.

By virtue of symbolism many works of art have won a wide appeal which would certainly have been denied them had they been couched in more literal language. Thus if the ideas of Dante's *Commedia* had been more literally expressed the result would probably much have resembled the *Summa* of Saint Thomas. While the latter work, however, is read only by theologians and philosophers, persons from all classes of mankind have enjoyed Dante's poem. The one belongs to the study alone, the other belongs also to the world. A naive reader may enjoy at least a large portion of the *Commedia* as mere imagery, altogether neglecting its philosophical meaning. Another reader may enjoy the entire poem with a most superficial view of its hidden values. The ideal scholar alone grasps its full esoteric significance. It is much

more just to say that Dante popularizes whatever admits popularization in scholastic thought than to declare that he actually veils philosophy. On the contrary, the thinker will readily discover Dante not only one of his own kind, but highly distinguished among the philosophical caste. Although the poet may at times sacrifice clearness, he gains many delectable experiences of which the pure philosopher remains unaware, and by virtue of his art enjoys the companionship of all orders of humanity.

The story of symbolical art constitutes at once the most fantastic and splendid chapter in the history of mankind. No modern scholar seriously claims that he or any man, of our own or of Saint John's generation, nay more, that Saint John himself, has comprehended the full meaning of the Book of Revelation. This book, according to orthodox teaching, records a vision vouchsafed to the saint. Not even the Church holds that its innermost mystery was revealed to its recipient. Mean whatsoever it may, this remains clear: that Saint John's book has been a fountainhead of infinite art, of the noblest of paintings, of the most sublime of portals, of the loftiest of poems, of the most imbecile of maunderings, and of the grandest prose in the English tongue. Such is the phantasm of the human intellect, to which logic comes merely as a bird of passage.

Only a somewhat austere and perverse mind will, I think, regret that much symbolical art has one meaning for one and another meaning for another reader. Rather let us be thankful that an art-work has often a multiplicity of meanings, extending its alms to all kinds and conditions of men. A striking example of the ambiguity of highly figurative verse may be found among the poems of Henry Vaughan. The Silurist wrote the following lines, which he entitled *The Shower*.

Waters above, eternal springs,
The dew that silvers the dove's wings!
O welcome, welcome to the sad;
Give dry dust drink; drink that makes glad!
Many fair evenings, many flowers
Sweetened with rich and gentle showers
Have I enjoyed, and down have run
Many a fine and shining sun:
But never till this happy hour
Was blest with such an Evening-shower.

This brief poem might well be called by any reader a perfect work of art. In its delicate perceptions of nature and innocence of spirit, a scholar might recognize a foreshadowing of the spontaneous love of nature in Wordsworth. A pure, joyous apprehension of the landscape, we exclaim, and with this thought may lay Vaughan's book aside.

Should the reader, however, examine the poem from the point of view of a devout Christian, its naturalistic imagery would appear merely incidental, and its religious imagery absorb practically the entire attention. The dove, before a bird only, now becomes the Holy Spirit; the rain that freshens the flowers, tears of grief and repentance; and the traveler's refreshment, the satisfaction experienced by the pious worshiper at the evening office of the Anglican Church.

Henry Vaughan himself presumably intended both meanings, and, I am disposed to think, both equally. Or better, it might be held that his metaphysical faculty actually identified the two meanings. The poem rises before us as the cloud-glorified sunset that it suggests. A hundred persons look upon the beauty of the sinking sun, and experience a hundred different emotions. A hundred readers view Vaughan's poem, each carrying away a different treasure, part of which each derives

from Vaughan's experience, and the remainder from his own personal store.

Symbolism lies as openly and freely upon the surface of thought as foam upon the sea. One symbol arises as another disappears, the mind continually shaping and destroying metaphorical elements. Upon writing these words I have for a moment only glanced out the window beyond my chair. Masses of white clouds at various elevations are magnificently sweeping across a pure blue sky. Instantly the ideas of change and permanence are suggested, quickly followed by ideas of energy and repose, time and eternity. Glancing once more over my shoulder I perceive two layers of cloud, one rushing close to the earth, the other moving with deliberate pace at a great height. My fancy at once suggests two types of mind, the lower clouds symbolizing Western, the upper Eastern thought. On glancing at an ominous mass, I see two dragons engaged in ageless warfare: the earth and the sky, rock and rain. Shutting my eyes, I hear the *finale* of the Third Symphony of Brahms. These images it will be observed arose intuitively. I was entirely unaware what ideas the sky at this particular time would suggest.

Under certain conditions, however, some mysterious power changes the restless surge of spontaneous imagery into forms of glazed and frozen permanence. First one image becomes permanently associated with another or with a general idea; and gradually a vast texture of imagery stretches in rigid fixity from horizon to horizon. A mythological or religious system is born.

Most religious systems of modern times express universal ideas in what may be termed a partial imagery only. This is to say, although all things are held to be mystically revealed, the symbols in which the explanations are couched constitute but a small fraction of

the objects and materials of which nature is recognized to be composed. Only certain objects, in short, are held sacred and symbolical. These systems have, of course, developed through long periods of human history. If a single artist attempts to express such a system fully, his original contribution to the symbolism will presumably be a distinctly minor part of his work. Thus in the expression of the Christian universe in the medieval poem, *Piers Plowman*, the author has built his imagery no less than his ideas upon orthodox lines, embellishing and rearranging his material only in points of detail.

No symbolical system of modern times surpasses in interest that of William Blake. His system is, to begin with, as inclusive as humanly possible. We may truthfully say that all the objects mentioned in his poems or depicted in his paintings have fixed symbolical values. This is not quite equivalent to saying that the universe to Blake was wholly symbolical. Theoretically such was the case, but in actuality Blake lived "in this world" as well as in his symbolical world of art and dreams. At times he was presumably unconscious of symbolical thinking; and many objects, for the most part of a social or utilitarian nature, fail to appear in his verses, and probably failed to enter into his world of "divine imagination." In essence, however, the poet discovered the material of the universe symbolical. Earth, air, fire and water, the four points of the compass, the four parts of London, of England and of the world, had symbolical meanings. Clouds, stars, sun and moon, trees, insects, birds and animals, men, women and children, the parts of the body, the chief characters of history and innumerable activities of life entered into his cosmic and imagistic scheme. Voltaire, Rousseau, George Washington and the Virgin Mary, were for Blake primarily not persons, but ideas. An old symbol acquired a willfully

new meaning in his system. Moreover to nature, history, science and inherited art he added novel fancies of his own, strange names and unheard-of monsters, dragons and chimeras dire, all factors in his vast plan. He borrowed of course much of his imagery and doctrine from Christian, classical and occult systems. Nevertheless the resultant universe was unmistakably Blake's. A more amazing egoist it would be impossible to discover.

To many persons Blake's most trying fault will, I presume, be what may be interpreted as his overdevelopment of system. "I must create a system for myself," he declared in a now celebrated passage, "or be enslaved to another man's." To many of us Blake appears a Titan enslaved to his own system. Wherever he looked, he became himself a Urizen enchained. He demanded of his ideas a ruthless subordination to preconceived personal opinions. He recognized, to be sure, a domain in which, as he wrote, "contraries are true." This domain was, however, a narrow and by no means fertile valley in an expanse of logical aridity. Enchained to his symbols, enchained to his ideas, he fretted and fumed throughout his intellectual career. Instead of walking through the world with the liberty enjoyed by a Hercules, he bore his own world vain-gloriously upon his back. The refutation of Blake's allegorical system lies in the myth of Atlas. Blake had learned to know his London, his England and his world, but to him was denied the wisdom acquired by Ulysses, who traveled far and seriously studied the thoughts and ways of men.

Blake attained a prodigious development in the intellectual life, that, in some respects, gave him a marked advantage over many of his contemporaries. He affords a fascinating contrast to Wordsworth. The latter poet, however much he may have labored to erect a system, was notably lacking in the powers of a system builder.

His ideas were too roughhewn to enter into any structure; and thus with symbolism for an inseparable companion he roamed for a life-time through the gentle informalities of the Cumberland landscape. He had no fixed symbols apart from the flag of Britain and the signs and insignia of the Anglican Church. Had he possessed the power to be a dramatic poet, he might have experienced no deficiency. But aspiring, with Lucretius, Dante, Spenser and Goethe, to be a philosophical poet, and lacking the power to fix his images and to clarify his ideas, he frequently descended into weak and desultory art. It is, I think, impossible to choose between the work of two such men as Wordsworth and Blake. Neither can, I believe, be thought wise, or entirely successful in the art of words. The brilliance of Blake is marred by eccentric pedantry, and the charm of Wordsworth by lapses of the intellectual and artistic faculty. Nevertheless England has produced few authors of more profound value to mankind.

The magic of poetic symbolism is nowhere so powerfully felt as in the case of a single image in a poetic ritual which gathers about itself the cultural life of an entire age. Before such a condition even the mystery of Blake appears prosaic. One of the most astonishing chapters in European history begins with Wycliff's proclamation of the doctrine of consubstantiation, as opposed to transubstantiation, and concludes two hundred years later with the great religious wars. The bread, declared Wycliff, still in substance remains bread! Ecclesiastical, political, aesthetic and moral life, indeed the major part of human thought, and action, came under the spell of this struggle. Even the chief metaphysical and philosophical disputes centered in the eucharistic war. Both Church and State were torn in two. No heresy was so odious to either party as that which concerned the Mass.

In the name of this cause hundreds upon both sides suffered legalized execution. All Christian art had hitherto been focused in the celebration of the sacrament. The cathedrals were the chests of stone which appropriately enclosed the mystery of the altar. Thus all the old art was denounced by the new teachers, with the entire priestly authority and devotional regimen of pilgrimages and sacrifices. The old morality had likewise been centered upon the Mass: a mystical expression that in substance renounced the physical and gave peculiar sanction to the supernatural life. The new morality profoundly revised the older conception of the flesh (the sacramental bread), and emphasized economic and social ideas. The whole temper of the people was deeply involved. The ancient popular faith had enjoyed an almost indecent accompaniment of mirth and grotesque humor, which from time to time had evoked strange revels even before the sacred shrine. The new Church, robbed of a shrine, became, like the new culture, cold, dour and grim. Throughout all this vast struggle of ideas, to the naked eye one poetic symbol had been the heart of the battle. One party stoutly contended for the maintenance of the ancient poetic ceremony, interpreted according to the Church of Rome; the other for a revised ceremony, interpreted according to the new Protestant Churches. History affords no more astonishing example of the power of a symbol to focus and to express the passions and ideas of men.

Man's thought remains still overwhelmingly symbolical. To require a reticent, literal language for poetry, therefore, combats the present constitution of the human mind. Poets over-literal in their language fail to hold our affection to the degree of those who freely offer us our beloved imagery. Even the genius of Pope or James Thomson pales beside the warmer spirit of Shakespere.

We feel the more metaphorical language of the great dramatist nearer to our hearts, and more accordant with the demands of poetry and art. Art as we should define it to-day would cease to exist if robbed of its symbolical aspect, since an essential tie which binds it to the dream consciousness would then be broken. Should art, on the other hand, become a maze of symbols beyond all control of the intelligence, it would fall back into a state of chaos, similarly losing its present identity. As long, however, as the mind remains constituted approximately as it is to-day, art must be continually informed with symbolic modes of thought.

6

FOUR PHASES OF POETRY

Nature itself seems at times to be self-critical, creating minds that admirably express the idea of type. The typical mind must always be the lesser, the synthetic mind, comprised of many types, the greater intelligence. Thus in illustration literary tendencies can, I think, scarcely be made more significant and clear than in a view of four English poets of the eighteenth century, who stand among neither the greatest nor the least of artists in words. George Crabbe strikingly typifies realism and the regard for knowledge; James Thomson, the conservative spirit of acceptance and affirmation; Thomas Chatterton, the dream spirit in art; and William Collins, the reflective, severely exacting, hesitating and prophetic temper. Each of these poets may well be the less esteemed because of the degree to which his thought became specialized. Each mind runs in a comparatively narrow channel; and may be thought of as a tributary stream that flows into the majestic current of a deeply synthetic genius. So one may select Goethe as the summation of all the tendencies stirring in lesser poets of various schools in the eighteenth century. Indeed we may well doubt if any poet more successfully than the great German has subsumed varied types of tradition. The chief poets can be typified only as the most comprehensive minds. Indeed their eminence often appears in direct proportion to their synthetic powers. The highest genius is he who stands most deeply in debt to mankind, who achieves individuality by means of eclecticism. Let us consider more specifically in what sense the four first mentioned poets may be truly declared typical, and in

what sense the mind of Goethe, a synthesis of their diverse qualities.

George Crabbe might be regarded as an early experimenter in the modern Short Story, as a somewhat dry pessimist, and, indeed, from a thousand special points of view. Nevertheless all roads in the study of Crabbe lead back to his insistent realism. This is intellectually his ruling passion. He frequently writes of romantic illusions, yet always treats such subjects in a cold and minutely analytical temper. Even when he accepts the subject matter of his romantic contemporaries, with his admirer, Jane Austen, in her *Northanger Abbey*, he turns upon romance the remorseless light of day. He does not altogether reject dreams; but wherever he selects dreaming for his theme he retains the analytical approach. Analysis means specificity. He holds up each particle of a larger mass for special and minute inspection; and never loses track of the details in the development of his ideas.

For it must not be supposed that realism or the spirit of knowledge precludes the spirit of interpretation. History and science alike lead us inevitably, by the mere statement of facts, to observe tendencies, which, since the facts in any subject can never be complete or wholly beyond dispute, constitute theories. Imagination is at all times essentially synthetic. Hence each of Crabbe's stories has its larger aspect, as well as its accumulation of detail. But the peculiar love of knowledge which in history and science we call the love of fact, and in literary criticism, the art of realism, appears in the retention of the details even in final presentation. Realism may be described as art which in dealing with substance never for a moment loses track of appearances.

Such art may have great strength. It engages our interest and sympathy through its social significance, and,

indeed, its practical value upon every hand. It intimately touches conduct, and stoops to present necessities. On the contrary we sense its defects, not only from the more severely aesthetic point of view, but from the moral and from the spiritual standpoint as well. We wish to have passions not merely analyzed but created and set before us. We seek for ideas more nearly universal than a minutely realistic art makes possible. Acute realism in tragedy becomes merely painful. Where institutions are compared and discussed as to their qualifications, the realistic manner may suffice. Where, however, emotions and ideas are traced to their sources in nature, we turn to other types of expression. In such a delicate social scene as that represented in Crabbe's tale, *The Confident*, we find the realist thoroughly at home. On the other hand in the broader delineations of passion we feel the superiority of a highly dissimilar literary form. Thus in *The Lover's Journey* the analysis seems deplorably cold in contrast to the love scenes of *As You Like It*; and such a tale as *Resentment*, where Crabbe aims at the direct expression of elemental feeling, falls unspeakably short of the supremely detached tragic art that depicts Regan, Goneril and Lear. An over-realistic style, amassing details of contemporary manners, as in the poems of Crabbe, or of ancient manners, as in the archaeologically inspired Roman tragedies of Ben Jonson, at least where certain types of subject matter are concerned, deprives the work of luminosity, significance and power.

The world would soon become a dreary place if poets and artists failed to give eulogistic expression to the conventional ideals of society. Without such ideals society cannot exist. The optimist has his inevitable place in art, no less than the pessimist or the satirist. Probably no more thoroughgoing and exuberant optimist who still retained a decent regard for facts has ever written than

James Thomson, author of *The Seasons*. For British food and drink, art and taste, commerce and manners, for British politics and indeed for the party at the moment in power, for the British philosophers and for the Anglican Church, even for the English climate, Thomson found nothing but approval. He typifies the mind that joyfully accepts life, triumphantly affirming that what is is right. He has tasted the life of his age, and found it good. His verse, with its strongly didactic and oratorical flavor, suggests a panegyric upon England delivered in gusto before the House of Commons. Like Edmund Spenser, who sings the praises of England as a Land of Faerie, blessed with an ever young and ever glorious Queen, Thomson proclaims all to be exuberantly well with the reformed British constitution, physical and political. Marvelously does the poet sense the positive forces of his age. Such idealism, expressive also of conservatism, every society demands as at least one of the characteristics of its art. All art we have seen to be to some extent illusion. Thomson's art is the illusion that society experiences when to the voice ever calling in the darkness, "What cheer?" another voice replies, "All's well." The spirit that desires exact knowledge, the spirit of dreams and that of far-seeking hope sense in the art of affirmation falsehood, harshness and crudity. Nevertheless by virtue of such art men take their most reposeful, happiest breaths.

Other artists seek illusion not in an optimistic affirmation of life as it exists, but in an escape from both reality and the stress of present waking life into the dominion of dreams. Here by virtue of a romantic spell that frees the mind from inhibition, dream figures expressive of the elemental passions arise in vivid or sombre pageantry, at times like colored insects sporting in the light of fancy, at times solemn or terrifying ghosts stalking through a

world of shadows. This domain of the imagination lies open even more freely to the child than to the man; and hence a child artist, Chatterton, best typifies its nature. Unsympathetic minds discover in the art of the most dream-like poetry no faults save an excessive indulgence of illusion, an excessive freedom from morality, with technical crudity and a general want of intelligence. The modern romantic poets, spiritually the heirs of Chatterton, exhibit all the glories and defects of this type of the aesthetic life.

Finally we have those idealists who seek in both art and life for an advance beyond the conventional modes of thought. These are the supremely reflective, but not in a strict sense the supremely imaginative poets. For imagination may fail them in their Quixotic effort to realize more than their social and even personal culture permits. Crabbe may in a sense be said to possess more imagination than Collins. At least he succeeded in writing creditable verse to nearly fifty times the volume of that of Collins. The latter poet placed almost impossible demands upon himself and upon his society. Like Blake and Coleridge, he sought the ineffable. And far more than they, he restrained his pen from crude and inadequate expression. He thought deeply, pondering how art might be lifted from its existing status, and in what type of society art might best flourish. He thought, I believe, on both art and life far more deeply than Shelley. No idealist in English literature stands more surely above and beyond his times, pointing prophetically to worlds unrealized, to a higher aesthetic culture than any as yet achieved in the Western World. Such a genius best typifies the poet who may claim also the name of prophet. To unsympathetic readers his intellectuality proves elusive; and both his discontent and his detachment, unintelligible. They perceive chiefly that he has failed in

spontaneity and conventional accomplishment. They fail to trace the rare refinement of his art, the profundity of his vision.

Each of the poets thus far discussed had marked limitations. None genuinely sympathized with the type of art cultivated by the others. Perhaps no writer of magnitude sufficient to subsume their distinctive qualities has since arisen in England. But such a writer arose in Germany. Goethe's novels show that he loved knowledge no less than Crabbe. Like the English poet, he possessed the scientific and historical frame of mind. Such poems as *Hermann and Dorothea* and the drama, *Egmont*, reveal Goethe as also among the great affirmative spokesmen of European culture in more grades than one. He is an optimist with Thomson and with Sir Walter Scott. Again, the dream-like imagery of many parts of his *Faust* and of much of his minor and distinctly romantic poetry allies him in spirit with the visionary in art typified in Chatterton. Finally, a vastly more effectual Collins, he stood as artist and thinker above his age and civilization, a dreamer upon worlds to come, and a prophet of a finer and more genuinely aesthetic life. His great power as a reflective poet chiefly distinguishes him from the more affirmative and conventional Schiller. In such a genius we see united the four chief component elements of the poetic mind, the love of knowledge, of affirmation, of vision, and of reflection, severally exhibited in the art of Crabbe, Thomson, Chatterton and Collins. Goethe himself may not without reason be said to symbolize the highest poetic intelligence of the modern world.

7

BEYOND SUBLIMITY

No work on the art of literature deserves, in my judgment, to be held in more esteem than the Greek treatise *On the Sublime*, conventionally ascribed to Longinus. Although intended primarily for the instruction of the classical orator, it contains a broad outlook upon imaginative literature. The writer employs illustrative quotation with a maximum of taste and point. He is always clear as to details. He never falls into pedantic or barren theorizing. His remarks have, as he rightly contends, a truly practical value, both for the future author, and for those who would understand the art. He writes, as Pope observed, in a style no less lofty than his subject, and proves himself artistically the peer of the great poets whom he cites. Above all, his work is everywhere pervaded with a single spirit, and the spirit itself powerful and noble. His treatise has gained rather than lost in glamour with the centuries. Upon what other work on the art of writing can such high praise be truthfully spent? Critical genius has never taken a loftier flight.

In his excellent book *On the Art of Reading*, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch compliments Longinus with the opinion that he wrote a fairly good book. As though he or any of us were worthy to touch Longinus' feet!

From the foregoing remarks it will I hope be clear that I have no desire to detract from the dignity of Longinus' theory, or the genius of his expression. One may seriously doubt if any work strictly on the aesthetics of literature will last so long as his, or so well. All great ideas, however, have their golden age, when they are re-

ceived with the ardor of faith, later to pass into the sobering perspective of time, to be revered still, but no longer actually accepted. The time has, I think, come when Longinus must be regarded as a monarch of a past age, but not the lord of our own. With the Renaissance, the literary ideals of the Greek critic enjoyed a new and lusty life. The waning of neo-classicism, however, has meant the decline in the spell which his thought casts over us. He remains a master, but has come decreasingly to be our master.

The power of Longinus rests chiefly in his gift to subsume classical literary ideas, so far as humanly possible, under the head of a single concept. Behind him lies, indeed, the master impulse not only of classical literature, derived from Homer, but of classical life itself. The ancient Greco-Roman world attained an unparalleled development of dynamic energy. An anthropocentric civilization taught the stern cultivation of bodily strength as civic duty. The citizens became men of conquest, glorious in war. They failed to develop the elaborate mystical and religious state of society which tends to individual quietude and repose. They contended in debate no less than in arms. Their daring and mastery of practical affairs led them as victors to the most remote portions of the known world, and enabled them to lay their yoke upon all who offered resistance. Such people naturally developed highly energetic modes of speech. The quieter, more contemplative forms of art proved less native to them. They created an art vehement in the expression of physical love and physical action.

The classics, someone has said, in the history of art signify repose. Let readers of Sappho and Pindar, Homer and Aeschylus, Xenophon and Demosthenes, Catullus and Caesar, judge with what justice this term

may be applied. Where, however, can be found more vehement expressions of a materialistic view of life at the same time consonant with our view of the nature of art? A people delighting in ardent living delighted also in an ardent art. Their conception of the highest poetry came thus to include a notion of the highest vehemence possible in aesthetic expression. This became the creed of Longinus.

The supreme passage of his discourse has been again and again quoted, but can never be pondered too much. "Nature never designed man to be a grov'ling and ungenerous animal, but brought him into life, and placed him in the world, as in a crowded theatre, not to be an idle spectator, but spurr'd on by an eager thirst of excelling, ardently to contend in the pursuit of glory. For this purpose she implanted in his soul an invincible love of grandeur, and a constant emulation of whatever seems to approach nearer to divinity than himself. Hence it is that the whole universe is not sufficient for the extensive reach and piercing speculation of the human understanding. It passes the bounds of the material world, and launches forth at pleasure into endless space. Let anyone take an exact survey of a life which, in its every scene, is conspicuous on account of excellence, grandeur and beauty, and he will soon discern for what noble ends we were born. Thus the impulse of Nature inclines us to admire, not a little clear transparent rivulet that ministers to our necessities, but the Nile, the Ister, the Rhine, or still much more, the Ocean. We are never surprized at the sight of a small fire that burns clear, and blazes out on our own private hearth, but view with amaze the celestial fires, though they are often obscured by vapours and eclipses. Nor do we reckon anything in nature more wonderful than the boiling furnaces of Aetna, which cast

up stones, and sometimes great rocks, from their laboring abyss, and pour out whole rivers of liquid and unmingled flame. And from hence we may infer, that whatever is useful and necessary to man, lies level to his abilities, and is easily acquired; but whatever exceeds the common size, is always great, and always amazing."

What the preceding section attains in power, the following attains in surprising incisiveness: "A certain writer objects here, that an ill-wrought colossus cannot be set upon the level with a little faultless statue; for instance, the Doryphorus of Polycletus; but the answer to this is very obvious. In the works of art we have regard to exact proportion; in those of nature, to grandeur and magnificence. Now speech is a gift bestowed upon us by Nature. As therefore resemblance and proportion to the originals is required in statues, so in the noble faculty of discourse there should be something extraordinary, something more than humanly great."

Perhaps the most enlightening passage in the work is the contrast drawn between Hyperides and Demosthenes. Hyperides is praised for unsurpassed grace, **simplicity**, wit, irony, neatness, dexterity, pathos, **copiousness**, **variety**, and even for his "air of vehemence." He **lacks but** one faculty: the genuine vehemence that amazes those who hear. None have equaled, continues the author, "the irresistible force, and the glittering blaze of Demosthenes' lightning." Whether we read or hear, we are overcome.

The writer of the treatise not only desires vehemence in all the subject matter of the highest literary art. He demands that the aesthetic experience itself shall take the mind by storm. Art is not primarily to please, because of its beauty, its truth, its fancy, its intelligence or its charm. It must descend upon us with Homeric

energy; it must resemble the lightning-stroke, or all that ever the ancients have spoken proves vain. . . .

Longinus enjoyed extreme favor in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. "What a tedious interval is there," wrote one of his translators, "between Longinus and Mr. Addison!" The same translator, William Smith, links his author's theory with English practice by notes illustrating the types of the sublime from the English poets. Here we are deeply instructed. Chaucer is, very naturally, not mentioned at all. Spenser is mentioned once. To Shakespere the editor proves more generous. But the great modern type of the sublime is, of course, Milton. Shakespere had given this phase of his art at best only a divided homage. Milton, however, wrote virtually upon the principles of Longinus. Addison, the arch-expounder of the Miltonic epic, had, we are told, strictly followed the path of the classical thinker in his sympathetic interpretation of the English poet.

Milton undeniably looks backwards to that phase of classical taste (and it was indeed a prominent one) championed in the work ascribed to Longinus. He denies himself many of the moods of poetry adapted by the modern world from its medieval inheritance. Thus the detached romancing of a Gower, the dark grotesques of a Dunbar, or the serene realism of Chaucer scarcely touches the temper of his work. He renounces the varied play of light and shade that gives such an amazingly life-like atmosphere to the heights of passion and the intervals of idle fooling in Shakespere. His landscape and characters are done in the grand manner. With Virgil, he renounces humor. He scarcely cares even to emulate those sunny spots of greenery that lighten the landscape of Ulysses' isle. He will not trifle, in company with Horace. He turns Theocritus into sermons; insists on the gravity of Spenser; and compares him with

Thomas Aquinas. He willingly renounces all the virtues that Longinus ascribes to Hyperides. More than any other poet, however, he achieves, for those who grasp his true intention, the supreme virtue of sublimity, which Longinus ascribes to Demosthenes.

I think it impossible for any critic who compares Milton and Shakespere to deny that Shakespere looks forward to the modern and Milton backward to the ancient world. Spenser synthesizes the medieval and the neo-classical temper, thus concluding the first great stage of the Renaissance. Milton, not Pope, best represents the second and the purest phase of the neo-classical tradition. This both Addison and Pope as critics themselves knew. Milton of all the moderns was the master of the grand classical style. Pope might aspire to be the new Horace; but the new Virgil had preceded him. Meanwhile a radical ferment was working. The Elizabethan genius had produced a spiritual force over two centuries in advance of its time. For a while the real meaning of its art was lost. To-day we know Shakespere as the greatest of the moderns. Even Spenser lies nearer to us than Milton. The Elizabethans possessed an outlook on art more catholic than that of Milton, Burke and Longinus. To Elizabethan eyes sublimity in art seemed but one of countless equally desirable qualities. They denied an aesthetic hierarchy in which sublimity stood at the head. The dramatic Shakespere, to be sure, was still not above the sensational. Spenser in his cool and delightful land of faerie, however, remained in mood the devout follower of Chaucer, who ever shunned, to use the language of a seventeenth century metaphysical poet, "words that amaze, but will not make us wise."

To some critics any departure from the canons of Longinus will seem to be an abdication of the divine afflatus in poetry, of which Longinus himself will ever

be named the high priest, and his treatise, the scripture. Others, however, will see in the change only the maturing of Western culture, the gradual enrichment of our thought, and its approximation to older and wiser aesthetic canons of the Orient.

8

NOT WITHOUT REFERENCE TO ARISTOPHANES

In his volume, *Convention and Revolt in Poetry*, Professor Lowes in several passages admonishes poets as to what they may or may not do with impunity. Poets may write of manners and contemporary affairs, declares Professor Lowes, if they will. He advises them to have an eye to the *Georgics* as a model for verse on an industrial theme. But the major part of such subject matter should be left to prose. If attempted in verse, the author may anticipate for his poem only inferior effects and a fleeting life. To confirm this warning the critic points to what he describes as the débâcle of eighteenth-century poetry, with its fondness for such themes as we discover in *The Art of Cooking*, *The Dispensary*, *Sugar Cane*, *The Fleece*, *The Spleen*, *Agriculture*, *The Art of Preserving Health*, and *London, or the Progress of Commerce*. Although I esteem Professor Lowes as undoubtedly one of the ablest writers on poetics in America, I am compelled to differ with him in this instance.

The problem is not so simple as might appear at first glance. Professor Lowes cites several undeniably inferior eighteenth-century productions. But the finest poetry of the same age with almost equal boldness presents images of a socially transient nature. Pope, Thomson, Swift, Gay, Crabbe, Cowper and Burns himself never, I think, were aware of the doctrine cited above. The fact, as Professor Lowes elsewhere in the same volume strikingly shows, is that successful poetry may be written in virtually any imagery. The imagination, not the images, produces art. The subject matter of poetry does not materially differ from that of prose.

The true distinction is everywhere of the spirit. A cramped, utilitarian attitude, wanting in luminosity and feeling, whether in prose or verse, always means bad art. We have small reason to fear the contemporary as such. Many eighteenth-century poems might of course be cited to support precisely the opposite of the critic's major contention. The eternal shepherd and shepherdess, the passionate appeal of any man to any woman, as easily becomes dull as the particularized poem becomes eccentric.

The examples of literary opportunism mentioned by Professor Lowes never were recognized as productions of strictly the first importance, and have, with the secondary work of other periods, fallen into general neglect. All ages of literary history from which more than mere fragments survive contain specimens of what may unquestionably be called the poetry of manners. In the eighteenth century such poetry came into slightly greater prominence than hitherto, although the historical distinction is not so great as one is at first tempted to suppose. The major poets, whose names I have cited, are in this regard actually representative of the larger number of the chief poets of any age. Professor Lowes, in the language of Chaucer, wittily observes that the lesser poets turn substance into accidents. The greater poets, of course, turn accidents into substance. Thus Pope shows us not merely the dress but the heart of an aristocracy; Gay, the same heart in a lighter mood; and Swift, the same once more as seen by the spirit sinister. Thomson takes the entire English people, their souls and bodies, for the theme of a patriotic masterpiece that deals only from the more external point of view with nature. Cowper etches not only a self-portrait, but detailed scenes of English life conceived in the spirit of the author. Burns gives us both the appearance and reality of the

life of Ayrshire; Crabbe, of the life of the English borough towns. All these poets turn accidents into substance. Professor Lowes must be well aware that to have substance without accident constitutes the theological premise, not of art, but of miracle.

"So long as a scientific textbook is obsolete in a decade or less, to poetize science is to court mortality." How far can we accept this statement? Much scientific writing has always been in the higher sense poetry. One thinks of the letters of Columbus, so full, to be sure, of erroneous conjecture as to geography and science, but so full also of the indomitable spirit by which man becomes immortal. Is science the less worthy of a poet's regard because so replete with life that it advances daily? Has the sailing ship lost its value for poetry? Is intellectual advance inimical to art?

Art on the contrary must always outlive much that is local in its composition, if it is to last for a century, or to extend its fame beyond the confines of a province. The artist who seeks for a universal subject matter must perish in his own Quixotic quest. The art that expresses the mythology, cosmology, science and manners of the ancients remains, long after their schools of thought have been submerged in the resistless current of time. It is my whimsical fancy that perhaps some day, as Dionysus examined the soul of Euripides, Aristophanes may examine a newer radical, Professor Lowes, in the regions of the dead, pondering who it was who could have warned poets to avoid contemporary themes.

"Contemporary science in Dante and Chaucer, and Ben Jonson and Milton is a stone of stumbling and rock of offense." Here indeed is no question of history whatsoever. Each of these poets chose to include certain technical matter in his verse. Each wrote, to be sure, with the thought of pleasing all men in something; but

only of pleasing some men in all. The ideal of "the learned poet" which still prevailed among the literary aristocracy of Spenser's day seems to meet with decreasing favor at the present time. Leave learning to the critics, in substance the critic declares. Undoubtedly the Second Canto of the *Paradiso*, describing an experiment in optics relative to a problem in the moon's substance, has offended many readers. It will also long continue to delight a few. I hardly know whether to describe Professor Lowes' statement in regard to Dante as expressing the dilettante or, in our modern sense, the democratic point of view. The pseudo-science in the *Alchemist*, one observes, has the more amiable quality of delighting all who enjoy the play, whether or not they know the literal meaning of a word of Subtle's jargon.

The chief inducement extended to the poet who is to choose more nearly universal themes for his art consists in a promise of long enduring fame. With some artists, especially during the Renaissance, this promise held a perceptible degree of inspirational power. Nevertheless the vast majority of artists have not, I think, sought any other than contemporary fame. Even the most imaginative and egotistical of men in our Western world have seldom looked for personal glory beyond the rites of burial. They have wished that their memory might live among their friends, and that whatever wealth or virtue they may have passed on to their family should remain at least undiminished. In accord therefore with the philosophy of society at large, the European artist rarely aspires to instruct or to entertain posterity. If, on the contrary, in aspiring to live fully his own life, he realizes the potentialities of his art and environment, posterity may confer on him a reward of which he has scarcely dreamed. The future loves best to crown the brow of one who has not even secretly wooed her, but who has

won the good fight, not knowing how fair a lady with how bright a wreath stood beyond him in the shadow. Professor Lowes suggests that the artist should not "court mortality," but fame. To this I reply that Fame does not love to be courted. She comes to those who have courted not her, but life. The suspicion of a timid and parsimonious nature always hangs over a poet's solicitude for the future at the expense of the present. I know of no great poet who has not lived much in the spirit of his age. We are coming, I believe, to recognize the shadow of a cloistral attitude in Keats to be something of a blemish. Exquisite as his art may be, it lacks the spaciousness of the greatest names, even of the name of Pope. The prophet of the Superman learned himself much from his contemporaries. John Wilson wrote some noble words concerning poetry, which contrast with the warnings of those who fear a contemporary subject matter. "This appears to us the true test of the mind which is born to poetry, and is faithful to its destination. It is not born to live in antecedent worlds, but in its own." To observe the world about him, and to draw from his observations the fuel to create art, must always constitute the major part of the activity of the great poet. As in life, so in art: he who is dreadless of death is the first to reap immortality. The hero falls with the light only of a present battle in his eyes. But the Valkyries come and bear his spirit to Valhalla. Meanwhile the solicitous few who have wooed posterity, no less than the mere opportunists, are speedily and justly forgotten.

9

LITERATURE AND SCIENCE

In our own times the relation of any branch of thought to science generally constitutes one of its chief problems. The rule holds good for art and literature. The circumstances however are here of such extreme complexity, that no simple answer to the questions raised can possibly be valid. A critic must at once begin by making distinctions. Thus art may be entirely compatible with science, but incompatible with the effects of science. Again, although art and science have been during the last hundred years on some grounds in conflict, and although they may continue in such conflict for some time to come, yet, as the two activities stand to-day, and as they will presumably stand for several generations, we may still conclude them to be fundamentally harmonious. So rapid is the development of science, that we find a real difficulty in confining our view even to the near future. We inevitably speculate as to a more distant age. It may well be that science, which now seems essentially hospitable to art, may in its more advanced forms take on a radically new aspect. With many qualifications which I hope later to make clear, I consider that art and science have inherited from the more recent past certain superficial grounds of contention; that we may expect in the near future a close accord between the two modes of thought; and that, while concerning the more distant future prophecy becomes dubious, the chances favor the destruction of all our present arts before a new spirit wherein art and life will become one through the instrument of science. The pres-

ent Essay constitutes a brief exposition of these observations and opinions.

In the fore-front of our discussion it becomes necessary to distinguish between pure science, or the process and core of scientific thought; the fruits of science for liberal culture, or in other words, the philosophical ideas and general knowledge derived from science by an intellectual class; and finally, industrialism, which also owes its existence to science, but constitutes a phenomenon of a very different species. Thus the question of the relation of the arts to science becomes three-fold. Three conclusions, in part true, but unhappily superficial, at once suggest themselves. The life of the scientist we perceive a peculiarly thrilling and admirable theme for art; there seems small reason to deny that the ideas and information cast into the lap of the poet or artist by science likewise constitute aesthetic material of the very highest order. Even industrialism supplies the artist with congenial themes—for indeed the whole universe offers itself to his disposal. Yet here we at once observe a contrast. While the essence of science is imagination, the essence of industrialism is mechanization. By the use of tools man may become superhuman and divine; when however tools use the man, man becomes less than an animal. The evolution of our world becomes inverted. Mind, which should make man free, creates the machine, which enchains him to worse than slavery. In the history of mankind to his present stage of evolution, art has constituted the greatest force making for human freedom. The machine however threatens to reduce much of human life to bondage. An essential antipathy is established between that which liberates and that which binds. Certain elements in industrialism, therefore, can under no account be reconciled with the vision of art. Hence that art should struggle with modern industrialism

affords no surprise, but that it should contend with science itself requires, I think, some explanation.

Science is, after all, merely the continuous effort of man to expand his mental powers and physical mastery through exact knowledge. Like art, it gives us life more abundantly. By means of instruments and tools modern thought continues vastly to enlarge the world in which we live. We know from year to year more of ourselves and more of the remotest heavens. Itself among the most magnificent of intellectual forces, science increases our vision on every hand. Its essential meaning is simply more and yet more life of thought. Where, then, we inquire, lies the cause for the hostility that undoubtedly to some extent exists to-day between it and art?

As the effect of science, rather than science itself, industrialism might logically but not wisely be omitted from the present discussion. To the subject of industrial materialism I shall return later. For the time being, however, we may reasonably confine ourselves to a study of science and its emanations in the intellectual culture of modern times. Nevertheless a brief retrospect proves essential as an introduction to contemporary conditions.

On viewing the relation of art and literature to science, we are at once confronted with the fact that we have preserved to us many comparatively successful assays on themes of science prior to the new epoch ushered in with the nineteenth century, and few satisfactory works of art expressing the far more remarkable scientific ideas of this epoch itself. Hesiod, Aeschylus, Lucretius, Dante, Spenser, Milton and even Goethe nobly voice the spirit of the science of their day. *The Seasons*, by James Thomson, was in its own times chiefly praised as a "philosophical," or as we should now say, a scientific poem. Even Thomson remains unsurpassed. Was Milton's primitive doctrine of the creation nobler

than ours, that he should have written his cosmology in such marvelous imagery, and we ours in such inferior forms? Does science become less poetic as it becomes more highly developed?

A popular but extremely vague theory offers itself at this point to our attention. It has frequently been held that poets are prophets who dimly foresee truth, and prepare man to attain and accept it. When the law of truth comes, that of art ceases. The veil of the temple is rent in twain when the mysteries are at last revealed. Undoubtedly this doctrine attracts us, but unfortunately it seems only in part tenable. Art not only looks into the future, but assimilates the present and reinterprets the past. Any theory of art based primarily upon its powers of foresight becomes, it appears to me, fantastic in the extreme. Under normal conditions art has the power to comprehend the present. Only somewhat abnormal conditions, then, can account for the recent falling off of merit in the poetic expression of scientific ideas.

The artist's instinctive fear of a mechanistic society wholly vulgarized by machinery must partially account for hostility between art and science. Nevertheless we shall hardly be convinced that we have discovered a sufficient clue to the present antagonism in an explanation that points only to the industrial problem. Let us seek more immediate grounds.

The present-day hostility has, I think, largely a temporary and superficial foundation—a creature, in short, of distinctly passing circumstances. We may seek its basis in a recent chapter of history. Modern science had, of course, its birth struggles. The most spectacular of its early conflicts was with religion, which, for reasons of its own, attempted to strangle the new science in its infancy. When science reached its youthful stature it

could afford to be magnanimous towards its aging and declining opponent. Meanwhile a less striking but in some respects a more lasting quarrel arose with literature and art leagued upon the opposition. Science fought to win a place in an educational system that since the sixteenth century had been above all else literary. This system was from its inception described as humanistic, a word chiefly significant as marking the departure of Renaissance from Scholastic philosophy. The advancing natural sciences found themselves striving for a place in a curriculum comprised for the most part of theology, languages, rhetoric, history, moral philosophy, and, to be sure, mathematics. In the world religion at first chiefly took up arms against science. In the schools however the chief competitor proved to be literature. Moreover scientific authors soon found themselves competitors with the literary conservatives. A new war of the intellect arose. In all its warfare science, to be sure, has shown the generosity that accompanies strength. To-day scientists, it appears, rarely feel and still more rarely express hostility to the arts. On the other hand artists of all descriptions have exclaimed against science. Keats prophetically heads the list. In *Lamia* he decries both moral and natural philosophy, stating, for example, the doubtful opinion that science has taken all magic from the rainbow. The literary view here seems essentially obscurantism: the more we know about a subject the more unfortunate we are in regard to it, and the less it lends itself as material for art.

In partial defense of Keats it must be recalled that science was commonly presented in the times of the poet as a power making for the most rigid dogmatism. Even in Thomson's *The Seasons*, we feel in many instances the chill of absolutism. In a passage upon the rainbow the poet abruptly interrupts his description to praise "thee,

awful Newton," by whom, in Pope's words, "all was light." While modern science promotes toleration and even the sense of mystery, the scientific thought with which Keats was chiefly familiar stopped short with a most irritating complaisance. To such dogmatism the poet expressed a natural antipathy. Yet it may be feared that Keats' own philosophy had within it a power to exclude even the more liberal science of our own times.

Before proceeding to an analysis of the direct question whether art and science as we know them to-day are theoretically repugnant to each other, we may consider still a further ground for their temporary estrangement. This factor may be expressed in the single word, specialization. Although the term has come into use chiefly in describing the activity of scientists, the charge actually falls, I believe, with equal weight upon the two parties. A temporary state of hostility has arisen through the estrangement which extreme specialization necessarily brings to pass. As a rule the modern scientist knows little of art, and the modern artist frequently still less of science—no more, perhaps, than did the late Mr. Bryan.

Scientists have too frequently, as the sinister phrase goes, "attacked their problem" with an intemperate enthusiasm. The youthful folly of overdoing has pursued them. Neglecting the beauty of the world, the wonder of life, the multiplicity of ideas and impressions unrelated or only incidentally related to the laboratory, they have immured themselves in austere technical study. No field of thought have they more generally neglected than that of art. They have too frequently lost the power of artistic expression. As a rule they fail to convey even their scientific ideas in a form significant to any reader beyond their own guild. They have too often lost account of the potential bearing of their work upon life,

and even have failed to express their personal delight in their own career. Because few scientists can give an account of their enthusiasm, outsiders have naturally but wrongly inferred that their work is in fact dry, dull, and as the popular term goes, unpoetic. The modern scientists are the poets of silence.

When the scientist actually emerges from his laboratory or expedition into the world of letters, he usually writes an undistinguished style, and curbs his genuine imagination in a painful effort to stoop to popular taste. The public itself has learned from the daily press and from periodical literature generally to be contented with mediocrity. The bare subject matter of science proves of such intrinsic fascination that many of these half-hearted popularizations rank among the best sellers. A few scientists, then, have learned the art of condescension. Their artistic writing, however, will never possess deep literary value till they have acquired that most difficult quality, complete sincerity.

Meanwhile the poets have been no less guilty of a confining specialization. The subject matter of the new science naturally came upon them as overpowering. Neither poets nor scientists had actually under control the enormous forces released. Consequently authors for the most part stepped warily aside, as they would do from an overcharged torrent, and walked through the calmer woods of yester-year. They have paid, however, the inevitable price of timidity and antiquarianism. The true poet, as John Wilson declared, is born to live not in antecedent worlds, but in his own. Whoever cultivates an outworn style will find his art growing daily more and more pallid, till eventually it loses all power and conviction. The artist, too, becomes insincere. He must either grapple courageously with the present, or languish to a gradual extinction. Especially in the do-

main of poetry, modern conservatism has almost fatally spelt decay. While the scientist has buried himself within his laboratory, the poet has buried himself within the past. Natural conditions have brought about the unfortunate severance of each from the greater currents of life; yet we may, I think, anticipate that in the near future these conditions promoting estrangement will largely disappear. The misguided *littérateurs* must in time discover their assaults upon science unavailing. The scientist, his intemperate ardor worn off with time, must learn the need for art, not only to enjoy life more widely, but to realize and to express his own experience more profoundly. The true poet must in time awake to the foredoomed failure of reaction, and, with the aid of the scientist, boldly attempt the assimilation of scientific images and ideas. Such at least should be the outcome, provided no obstacles more formidable than those already considered lie in the path of reconciliation. The first conditions to promote estrangement must pass away. Will they in passing, however, merely disclose more basic difficulties lying in the very nature of the two activities? Let us briefly consider the most serious charges of incompatibility between art and science.

I have elsewhere mentioned the possibility that the cold rationalism implicit in science might prove a chilling neighbor to a mental state that mediates between waking and dream. Can the man who is at one time thoroughly rationalistic, be at another time the dreamer of art? My conception of human nature is, I confess, too broad to lead me seriously to doubt that such contrasting moods may flourish within the mind.

Of course science and art at times differ widely. The mind, however, is a mighty empire that embraces many widely opposed kingdoms. To show that one kingdom must in the course of time destroy another, we must show

not merely that competition exists between them, but that hostilities threaten and that a war must be fought to the uttermost. Although it is impossible to serve God and Mammon, it remains entirely practicable to worship Apollo and Athene.

Let us examine the three grounds most commonly alleged for hostility between the two kingdoms. Science is declared work where art is play; inhumane where art is humanistic; and truth-seeking where art nurses illusion.

Science is said to be work and art play. Yet art also calls for labor. Many an artist has worked himself to the point of physical and mental exhaustion in search for the right word, the right note or the right color. Behind all great art lie some learning, some scholarship in ideas, and study of technique. Many modern artists, indeed, as Stravinsky, approach their task with an almost scientific attitude of experimentation and laborious research. On the whole, however, science is undeniably the more laborious field of the two. The scientist may acquire a genuine love for the steady, patient, unimpassioned attention which his work exacts. Nevertheless he labors for years or perhaps for a lifetime at subordinate problems, which he coldly views in the light of means, not ends. However imaginative and emotionally stimulating his theories in the end may be, like Darwin he must bow to a more nearly continuous yoke than the artist. The artist's labor is, in short, more concentrated and intense, the scientist's, more equably distributed. Yet, after all, this distinction means but a slight cleavage in temperament. The scientist has his moments of intuition, the artist his periods of disciplinary study. I can find no fundamental ground for hostility here. The two activities appear as two brothers, one with more in him of the father, the other with more of the mother.

The second objection urged against science by over-ardent devotees of the older humanism is that science deals with the non-human. This comment deserves, I think, only the briefest attention. Obviously modern science instructs us in a most intimate manner concerning ourselves. Psychology, physiology and biology reveal to us new qualities, actual and potential, of the human being. Science has been the means of refashioning our modes of living, and will long continue to exercise this power to an increasing degree. Moreover only an extremely limited classical humanism will contend that man should find his interests in life to rest alone or even primarily with society. We are all disposed to observe the beauty and wonder of the universe from which we have sprung. To escape from the personal into the universal has indeed been a prevailing urge in both art and religion. The universal is human also. Whoever objects that modern science is not potentially warm and humane has, I believe, decidedly questionable views of both science and life. This argument for the incompatibility of art and science, may safely and speedily be dismissed.

It is frequently held to the same effect that art, dealing so largely with fiction, must in the end prove irreconcilable with science, which aims to dispel illusion with truth. To this objection the classical critics, as Sir Philip Sidney, give, I think, a sufficient answer. Nevertheless we may couch the argument in modern terms. Art indeed cultivates many moods that to the rational mind appear to overshoot the mark. Here, for example, it appears flushed with optimism, there shadowed with acute pessimism. Gilbert delightfully mocks the sentimentality so typical of English art.

Hail, Poetry, thou heaven-born maid!
Thou gildest e'en the pirate's trade!
Hail, flowing fount of sentiment;
All hail, divine emollient!

On the other hand, if by a similar ironist the Russian rather than the English Muse were invoked, we might with equal justice hear the divine power praised for turning figs to thistles, and honey to gall. The greatest art, however, rarely appears either consumptive or dyspeptic. Homer, Dante, Shakespere, Goethe and Tolstoy are scarcely more biased in the presentation of life than the leading minds in science and philosophy. Here is the pith of Charles Lamb's opinion regarding the sanity of true genius.

While the case for the negative grows, I think, weaker the more it is examined, powerful reasons may be urged for believing in the fraternity of the two great intellectual kingdoms. Literature and science are but two phases of the imagination dealing with its one subject matter, experience. To the seriously inquiring mind the different intellectual techniques prove basically to have much in common, as do all the works of human genius. A new *genre* in art and a new theory in science are essentially offspring of one faculty. The little, unimaginative minds in science resemble the little, unimaginative minds in art. Darwin's vision of the animal kingdom is of one substance with Shakespere's vision of King Lear and his unhappy world. The imaginative power by which the old astronomers harmonized the heavens is one with the power by which Dante conceived Heaven, Purgatory and Hell to be one imagined universe in the mind of God. Logic in both art and science means the dependence of the least part upon the whole. Rigidity in art and in science prove in the last analysis to be one.

Art has hitherto been one of the chief factors in lib-

erating man from his commonplace, utilitarian environment. It has either revealed to him the wondrous intricacy of his most familiar life, led him into far starry spaces, or, preferably, shown him the star in his bosom, and the actual city in which he physically abides a part of the universal city of nature. Although conservative canons of literature have at times confined the poet within strict limits of time and space, the art of poetry has on the whole enjoyed much freedom in tracing relationships between near and remote, present and past, infinitesimal and infinite. Countless poets have beaten shadowy wings against the metaphysical mysteries.

To this age-old longing of art, science gives a new power of wing and a new sureness. Physics, for example, proves essentially in harmony with art's genius. It builds a universe of elements, as the musician a universe of themes. The electrons and the stars consort together in the universe of science, which Keats declared took poetry from heaven and earth. A more just statement would have been that to science both heaven and earth become less a reflection of our naive human existences. The stars no longer spell mythology. Their power to move the prepared imagination however has, I believe, increased rather than diminished. To the naive mind the rainbow stands only in the heavens. Science has taught us to discover its law equally exemplified in the smallest ice crystal that glows in the sunlight. I may literally hold a rainbow in the palm of my hand; the mystery made more imminent, not dispelled. Has science, then, added or detracted from the wonder inspired by the phenomenon which Ceres, in *The Tempest*, so charmingly calls the rich scarf to her proud Earth? Sir Thomas Browne would not give us Keats' answer to this question.

Science has opened the doors of long-hidden treasure,

and multiplied a thousand times the wonder of the world. Poetry scarcely antedates Homer; other arts would begin for us in an even less distant period, were it not for the scientific spirit of the archaeologist. Our museums of art, for example, house as a rule only treasures of the well known and more recent cultures. A museum of science, however, far better approximates universal-mindedness. There objects from the most distant quarters of the globe and the most remote periods of human life may be found, beside relics of long extinct species, geological specimens, models of the heavenly bodies, and meteorites of all varieties fallen from them. Science has dealt an insurmountable blow to the old religion, but at present imperatively demands that its aesthetic and synthetic meanings be cast into art. It has built a new garden in which art may disport itself.

Like history and philosophy, science may employ other symbols than words, but still depends largely upon words. A few painters have already with considerable success given us imaginary interpretations of, let us say, the appearance of the earth from the moon, or life in the paleontologic periods. As painters, sculptors and musicians become increasingly moved by scientific imagery and ideas, they will, of course, express themselves frequently in such terms. The scientist himself, however, from whom I am convinced the chief art strictly upon his subject must come, will in the near future work presumably for the most part in words. In this consideration lies one of the distinctly hopeful outlooks for literature.

Despite the importance of technique in literature, I am not disposed to regard it as a profession. The first requisite of a writer has always been that he shall have something to say. Thereafter let him seek the power of expression. Those who have sung the primitive epic have,

I presume, known the heat of battle. Sappho is not reputed to have written of love until she had experienced it; nor Virgil of the Roman state until he had observed it develop beneath his eyes. Similarly to know science as the poet of science must know it necessitates the most intimate type of acquaintance with the theme. A few years' reading in evolution during spare hours, for example, will hardly prepare a writer to compose an "epic" on the subject.

The prospects of the alliance of art and science are so vast that at the present juncture it would be far too bold to prophesy what types of art scientific themes will produce. Science itself has expanded life in all directions. It teaches us more of ourselves, of our minds and bodies, our dreams and desires. Its methods have been applied to the study of social forces and to the guidance of the state itself. It has mined the past, and thrown open a vast, dim aisle of the future. It has prompted many optimistic and pessimistic views of life, and already a few more equably balanced philosophies. In its spirit of exactness it appears agreeable to the aesthetic genius, for example, of Jane Austen. In its bold transitions, showing us now a splinter of primeval rock and now a moth's wing, it surpasses the most fantastic fairy tale as yet dreamed by poet. The spaciousness of modern art under science can best be understood from a perusal of Mr. Hardy's, *The Dynasts*. If the entomologist, after his study of the weird metamorphoses of insects, their extraordinary habits and social codes, has not a sense of humor, he has certainly been born under a dull planet. For the lover of beauty science has brought new wonders to light: marvelous colors glowing in hitherto unknown stones; electrical discharges; and jewelled forms of microscopic life. It has made familiar to any civilized man who seeks the knowledge, beauty that was hitherto the

secret of isolated tribes. In science lie both sympathy and detachment, serenity and excitement. Upon its course the fate of humanity now in large part depends. The humanist must therefore be the student of science. On the other hand science tells us of millions of worlds uninhabited by man, and of animal life ages before man appeared upon the globe. Hence man is able to look with more aloofness upon his own nature, viewing it as an infinitesimal episode in the ever-unsolved nature of the cosmos. Science and art in this respect flow in entire harmony with religion, all in the end promoting wonder. Or we may, in imagination, return to a primal intensity, and share the ferocity of prehistoric animals who battled for the possession of their earth. Science, in short, actually excludes no mood, but heightens all. Under its inspiration art in all phases is promised a vastly accelerated development. The arts depending upon elaborate mechanism may in the end outstrip the art of words; but for a great time to come scientists will, as I have said, use language as their chief vehicle of expression. Although I fully recognize that science and art have certain planes in which the two modes are irreconcilable, that art and science are basically hostile appears to me a strange and untenable hypothesis.

In the near future we may anticipate much close and friendly intercourse between the two kingdoms. Science and art, as the chief of our intellectual activities, stand for the present united against a common foe. The truth is, not that they are hostile to each other, but that both are beset by a common enemy, the unruly, ugly and barbarous child of science, the creator of modern warfare and modern philistinism, and of all qualities unmistakably sinister and deformed in modern life. This common foe is, of course, industrialism when uninformed by the wise guidance of philosophy, by the beauty of art, and scorn-

ful even of science itself. In a society whose activities are largely determined by scientific invention, the scientists themselves not infrequently endure poverty and neglect. The giant form of democratic industrialism has become the chief menace to both science and art, and to all the finer instincts and achievements of humanity.

Thus far we have considered the case for the essential hostility of art and science in the present and near future, and found the hypothesis distinctly contrary to fact. We may now glance for a brief moment into the more distant future. Here one can speak with no certitude. In the consideration of so distant a prospect, one can deal only in remote probabilities.

Three such chiefly merit our attention. The first may be stated with the utmost simplicity. The monstrous form of an industrial democracy, although begotten by science, may rise in grim mechanistic power to crush all progress and ultimately all life in art and science alike.

The two latter possibilities afford a brightening prospect for mankind. I have said that within the near future, unless we assume a triumph of a grossly material philosophy and a general democratic degradation, the extinction of art, as we now know it substantially to be, is hardly to be imagined. Nevertheless on the most distant horizon loom radically new possibilities. The revolution which science can accomplish in human life within the near future has, after all, its bounds. We must however consider as at least possible so great an advance in science that ultimately man with his physical senses may more nearly achieve his desire for the universal than at present through art or religion. Science may place at our disposal such means for observing the world and the universe, either while physically motionless or while hurled through space and time, that no pictures or words of art will vie with nature thus disclosed. The enchanted

glass of Merlin, the magical carpets of the Persians, and the mythical dragons of the East, who flew through all material substances and aeons of time, may become the actual playthings of man. The universe would then be the instrument upon which mankind, either individually or collectively, would sound a universal harmony. Life and art would thus become one in the contemplation of the universe. The phantom of this dim, religious city of Sarras gleams faintly across the waves. All arts would there be lost in one art, and this art be the flower and fruition of science itself. This would imply an evolution without hostility, and a consummation of the many in the one.

If this picture of the triumph of life and science, instructed by the spirit of art, seem too dazzling, we are of course entitled to envisage a third possibility. Mankind may despair of bringing science to a consummation in art, or art in science. Moreover the only way to secure men from the tyranny of machines may prove to be the drastic measure of renouncing science, by which machines are produced. In this event, should the human race prosper and produce a culture upon a purely aesthetic foundation, that state would no doubt in many respects resemble the most thoroughly and sincerely aesthetic culture which the world has thus far known: that of ancient China.

In short, three outstanding possibilities confront us. Either industrial and mechanistic democracy may create a wave of vulgarity and philistinism destroying both art and science; art may flourish without science; or the present arts may go to destruction, while science itself makes possible a more spacious and unified aesthetic life. The first hypothesis appears too dark to be wholly credible; it suggests dictation from despair, rather than from a study of the case; while a more general and a deeper de-

velopment of older aesthetic modes seems too distinctly retroactive to accord with the process of evolution. Is it then an altogether fanciful conjecture that the Greeks were endowed with a prophetic wisdom when they held the worship of all art and science to be the service of the one god, Apollo?

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